

Our Little Old Lady

Eleanor Hoyt Brainerd



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OUR LITTLE OLD LADY

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Bettina

Concerning Belinda

How Could You, Jean?

Misdemeanors of Nancy

Nancy's Country Christmas

Personal Conduct of Belinda



"Robert played the flute beautifully. I had a real sweet little voice . . . so he taught me dozens of songs"

OUR
LITTLE OLD LADY

By
Eleanor Hoyt Brainerd



Garden City New York
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TO
OUR LITTLE OLD LADY

*whose treasured memories of yesterday have
never dulled her sympathy with to-day,
these stories, which are already
hers, are lovingly dedicated*

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OUR LITTLE OLD LADY

CHAPTER I

She Tells What it Means to Have a Real Grandmother

SHE lives, incongruously enough, in a little New York apartment; but she belongs in a home of ampler spaces, of hallowed traditions, of roots running deep into the soil. One has but to look at her and straightway scents of lilac and syringa come stealing in through open windows, past fluttering curtains of muslin and chintz. She rimes with old-fashioned gardens and mahogany four-posters, with deep hearths on which great logs glow warmly, with faded daguerreotypes and sun-ray quilts and spacious attics and cellars,

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apple-scented, and preserve closets, and linen laid away in lavender.

For she is an old lady, a genuine old lady who has been well content to ripen sunnily, without fighting the years; and, because of the beautiful acquiescence of her old age, she gives even to a New York flat something of that full-flavoured serenity which distinguishes a home from a place where one lives.

She has worn black for forty years, and the reasons for her leaving off colours and never going back to them were heartbreaking reasons; yet her black is not sombre. No one could associate sombreness with her. The tears never quenched the twinkle in her eyes and the aching never froze the warmth in her heart. A snowy kerchief, fastened by an old-fashioned cameo brooch, always relieves the simple black frock at the throat, and a cap as white—a cap with lappets—

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crowns the smoothly parted, silver hair. She has her vanities, this very human old lady, and the kerchiefs and the caps go to the country for their laundering. City washerwomen and city soot are a strong combination, and caps and kerchiefs, mind you, must be white, uncompromisingly white, if they are to be worn by dainty old ladies with country traditions.

It is a grief to the Little Old Lady that her foolish children will not allow her to wear the plain full skirts of her fancy, and insist upon making her gowns conform at least slightly to the fashions of the passing seasons; but she submits cheerfully enough, so long as the changes are not too radical, and only about bonnets is she unalterably firm.

Year after year she has bonnets made from her old model, ample bonnets fitting down well over her head,

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simply trimmed and tied on with substantial strings. No excrescences, no nodding plumes, no rampant bows. Occasionally a brisk, self-confident saleswoman, with no sense of the eternal fitness of things, attempts to sell this gentle, smiling soul an up-to-date bonnet.

“Why, bless your heart,” she says encouragingly, with that bland and buxom familiarity which knows no reverence, “you don’t want to wear an old-fashioned thing like that! Now here’s a lovely bonnet for you—just the thing. Not a bit too youthful. Don’t you get an idea you’re too old to be stylish. There aren’t any old ladies nowadays.”

The Little Old Lady divides a pitying smile between the saleswoman and the bonnet.

“Perhaps I *am* the last real old lady,” she says, with gentle dignity. “But I wouldn’t want my grand-

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children to remember me in that bonnet. One does owe something to one's grandchildren."

There are many things about modern conditions that worry the dear woman, but the grandchildren of the future actually tug at her heartstrings. She considers that they are being robbed of their birthrights. No old-fashioned grandmothers are growing up for them and that thought weighs upon her.

Once upon a time she went to an open meeting of a famous woman's club, haled forth by a family friend who has ideas about keeping young through facial and mental massage. The Little Old Lady came home tired and for a wonder depressed—she who so seldom shows a sign of depression.

"Oh, yes," she said when questioned, "the meeting was lovely and the papers were very clever, but I couldn't help thinking all the time how glad

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I was that my grandmother hadn't been dressy and excited about the drama. I suppose women are forging ahead. Everybody tells me that they are; but I do deplore the conditions that make the modern woman necessary. We worked hard in the old days but no harder than the women work now. The work was different, that was all. But it seems to me there were more happy women then than there are now and everybody one talked about wasn't 'on the verge of nervous prostration.' Family life was sweeter and sounder, too, though there weren't so many theories about bringing up children.

"Oh well, the world has changed and women have had to change with it. I'm not foolish enough to put a spoke in the wheel even if I could. It will all work out right in God's good time—but I do feel sorry for the grandchildren who aren't born yet.

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It seems as if every child has a right to an old-fashioned grandmother."

And then she drifts into talk about her own grandmother, and, as we listen, we begin to understand and share her sympathy for the generations to come; begin to feel sorry for those unborn babies who are to be our grandchildren and who will have no grandmother like this sweet Little Old Lady, and no memories such as she has stored away in her heart.

"Of course I had two grandmothers," she says, as she takes her knitting from its basket and settles herself in the straight-backed chair which is her especial property. Lounging was not fashionable in her young days.

"But Grandmother Willoughby was the grandmother we visited and Grandmother Martin was the grandmother who lived with us. We loved Grandmother Willoughby. She was

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little and fine and delicate and very proud of her Virginia ancestors. Visits to her were always exciting and she made wonderful spice cookies, but we were just a little bit in awe of her. She had such high standards of table manners and cleanliness and conversation! Grandmother Willoughby always used to make me feel grubby and ashamed of it. Now Grandmother Martin didn't like grubbiness, but some way or other she always seemed to realize that my little soul was clean and that the outside dirt would come off with persistent scrubbing. That was one of the nice things about Grandmother Martin. She was comforting even when she scolded, and she didn't scold very much.

"Maybe she was more tolerant than the other grandmother because she hadn't always been able to keep out of the toil and dust of life herself. She was sweet and refined and as neat

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as wax, but she wasn't the rose-leaf sort. She and Grandfather had done pioneering in their day, coming over the mountains, from Virginia into Kentucky, with the early settlers and making a home for themselves in a new, rough land. I used to love her stories about their first cabin and its makeshift comforts, and especially about the Indians who roamed around the settlement and would press their faces against the windows and look in at the family in the evenings. I can remember how creepy that always made me feel, and to this day I hate to sit in a room after dark with the window-shades up—though I reckon an Indian would have trouble climbing up here to the eighth floor and looking in at us.

“Now, mind you, Grandmother Martin had just as good Virginia blood in her veins as our other grandmother, but she married a poor man

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and took her chances in a new country and she developed different views about what went to the making of a gentleman or a gentlewoman. The pioneer life gave her strength, and force, but it didn't crush out her sweetness. I should say not! Why she was the lovindest soul! She loved everything from the pigs and turkeys up. I never could love turkeys. They're the 'ornariest' things in the world, but Grandmother loved them. And most of all she loved little children.

"She had a genius for mothering. No; I reckon I'll say that she had a genius for grandmothering. I suppose she had both, but you see it was the grandmothering I knew most about. Mother and Father had ten children and the next to the youngest one was always 'Grandmother's baby.' She couldn't bear seeing one baby's nose put out of joint by a newcomer;

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so she tried to make up to the one that was pushed aside, for having lost first place in Mother's arms, and I don't believe any of us ever missed our lost thrones very much. I know I didn't.

"I was luckier than my brother and my sisters because I was next to the youngest in our family. A little sister came along when I was three years old and I was promoted to be Grandmother's baby; the little sister went away from us but Grandmother's baby I always was until she said good-bye to us when I was a big girl. She always tucked me in at night and heard my prayers and darned my clothes and doctored my wounds. It didn't make any difference whether the scratch was on my skin or on my feelings, Grandmother knew how to heal it.

"She was 'Grandmother' to me. Mother's mother was only 'Grandmother Willoughby,' and there was a

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big gulf between the two. You could get along without going on visits and eating spice cookies, but how could you get along without being tucked in at night and having some one to listen while you confessed your sins?

“I was a dreadful child on clothes. It did seem as if I never went out of the house without tearing something, and the nicer and newer the clothes were the worse were the accidents that happened to them. Mother used to get discouraged at times and punish me for carelessness; but Grandmother understood, and if I could get to her without any one else seeing me she could usually patch me up so that nobody else would have to know what had happened. I remember there was a way of climbing on the grape arbor and then on the low woodshed roof and scrambling into Grandmother’s room through a back window and that’s how I used to reach her

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when I was hard pressed. She did miracles of mending. I wore out my little stockings at a most amazing rate, but I couldn't wear them out as fast as Grandmother could knit them for me. She could set up a pair of stockings and finish them for me in a day when I was little, and even when I got to be a big girl she could knit a pair for me in two days.

"I can see her knitting-needles twinkling now. I used to sit and watch them fly, in the early evening, while Grandmother told me stories. And then, by-and-by, they would begin to blur and the story would wander off into queer confusions, and the next thing I'd know Grandmother would be tucking the bedclothes around me and telling me that she thought God would hear my prayers if I said them in bed. She wasn't on as formal terms with the Lord as Grandmother Willoughby was—or as

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Father was, either. They tell me that Father wasn't always so desperately religious, that he was very gay and tolerant and fond of the good things of life until his first baby died. That changed him. He was always friendly and kind and hospitable and everybody liked him; but as far back as I can remember religion was a very serious matter in our family, and Father believed that babies were never too young to have the fear of eternal punishment instilled into them. I would have been terribly worried about my soul, when I was five or six years old if it hadn't been for Grandmother. She used to tell me very reassuring things about God, and, though they didn't seem to fit in with what Father read out of the Bible, I knew she must be right. It never occurred to me that she could be wrong about anything. So I gradually got the idea that somebody

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had been fooling Father, and that God was a nice, friendly, white-haired old gentleman who looked a good deal like Grandmother—only without her cap—and who loved little children and felt so badly when they did wrong things that one really couldn't be deliberately bad and make Grandmother and Him unhappy.

“It was a pretty good working religion, but Father would have been scandalized if he had known how familiar and friendly I was with my Creator. I reckon even Grandmother would have been a little bit distressed if she could have known just what my idea of God was; but she taught me to love Him, and that's a great thing for a child. I've changed my idea of Him considerably since then, but I've never stopped loving Him.

“Grandmother was strait-laced about some things, though. She couldn't stand playing cards and

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thought that any one who played with them was on the broad downward path. The only cards I ever saw, before I married and went to Cincinnati with your grandfather, were a Queen of Hearts and a King of Spades that made the backs to an old needle-book of Grandmother's. I don't know how in the world she came to have that needle-book, but she did, and it had a horrible fascination for me. She had told me once that the cards were the 'devil's picture books,' and of course, I took it literally. I wondered and wondered how Grandmother ever got them away from the devil, and I had a sneaking idea—sort of half way between a fear and a hope—that he'd try to get them back some day and maybe I'd see the tussle. Of course I knew Grandmother would be more than equal to the devil, and I was sure nothing could happen to me if Grandmother was there to look out

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for me; but at times I used to think about that fight for the picture books, when I was in bed in the dark, and it made my flesh creep. I never liked to have Grandmother carry the needle-book when she went to spend the afternoon with neighbours and took her sewing along instead of her knitting. It seemed to me that lonely country roads couldn't be safe places in the shadowy end of the day for an old lady with the devil's property in her reticule; but I never said anything to Grandmother about it—she didn't encourage talk about the devil.

“That reticule of hers was a wonderful bag. I don't know what she would have done with one of the foolish fancy little bags I have to carry. In those days you never knew what you might want to take with you or bring home when you went visiting, but there was one thing sure: Grand-

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mother never went anywhere without bringing something home in her reticule for me. I don't know what I'd have done if she had failed me. My world would have seemed topsy-turvy and I wouldn't have had any confidence in the sun's coming up the next day.

"If she went to the town twelve miles away, or even to the village two miles away, looking in the reticule was tremendously exciting. Maybe I'd find peppermint sticks or hoarhound drops or gum drops, and candy meant something to children then. We weren't weaned on it the way children are now.

"And there was always a chance that there would be something even better than candy in the reticule—a new hair ribbon for Sundays, or a nice long slate pencil, or a new pair of stubby little brass-toed shoes, or a toy. Father didn't approve of toys, but Grandmother said a peg top had never

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spoiled any child's morals, and when Grandmother really asserted herself Father usually backed away. They had quite a set-to one day when Grandmother came back from Madison and brought me a little gold locket. I almost died of joy over that locket, but Father called it a 'gaud' and quoted Scripture against jewelry until I ran away to Grandmother's room and hid, with the locket buttoned inside my pinafore for fear it would be taken away from me. By-and-by Grandmother came upstairs looking exasperated. She sat down in her chair by the window and said something to herself about wondering why the Almighty went ahead and made buttercups golden when there were men coming along who could prove to Him that it would make the grass immoral. I didn't understand, but I came crawling out from under the bed, and when she saw me she

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laughed and took me up in her lap. Then she found a little blue ribbon in her workbox and slipped the locket on it and put it around my neck under my dress. She said I'd better wear it there for a while except when I was going visiting, but that Father was willing I should keep it.

“My goodness, it wasn't any wonder I loved that grandmother! Even if she only went away to spend an hour or two with a neighbour she never came back with an empty reticule. She'd always slip a cooky or a piece of cake or some nuts or an apple into her bag 'for the baby.' I used to sit on the front stoop watching for her, with my elbows on my chubby little knees and my chin in my hands, and as soon as I'd see her shirred, black silk bonnet coming up over the rise of the hill I'd go scuttling down the road to meet her, my little legs fairly twinkling over the ground,

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Maybe the apple or the cooky wouldn't be nearly so good as those we had in our own cellar or pantry, but it always tasted better. The reticule gave it a flavour.

"I can remember when Grandmother began to fail. Even at eighty she walked briskly and could ride a horse to the village and back without feeling any the worse for it, but soon after that the years began to tell on her. She was just as bright and cheerful as ever, but she seemed contented to sit by the fire or by the window, and she didn't go about the farm as she always had. I couldn't understand it at all and I missed her; but I knew she would always be there in the living-room, ready to listen when I would come in brimful of wonderful news—and that was a very comforting thing.

"She used to spin instead of knit that last year. Some way or other

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knitting hurt her wrist; but she loved to spin on a little wheel of her own, and she used to card her own wool, too, though Father sent his to be carded by machine.

“Grandmother would sit spinning and spinning and spinning until it seemed as though so much of it must harm her, and the friends and relatives began to worry about it. Some of them talked to Father and told him he ought to keep Grandmother from working so hard, and then, of course, he talked to her, but she only laughed and shook her head and twirled her wheel.

“He reasoned and argued and begged, day after day.

“‘People think you *have* to work hard,’ he used to say. ‘They’re telling around that I ought to take better care of you and see to it that you rest and save your strength.’

“‘Eh, lad,’ Grandmother would

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say. 'People will always be talking, but you and I know that I never could rest with idle hands. I'll be having my long rest when the day comes that stills my wheel.'

"But the uncles and aunts and cousins kept nagging at Father, and at last, one afternoon, he came into the house looking bothered and stern and a little shamefaced. He walked right across the room to where Grandmother sat and took the thread out of her hands.

"'This has got to stop, Mother,' he said. 'You are killing yourself.'

"Then he picked up her wheel and marched out of the room with it.

"She didn't say a word, but there was a look on her face that made me feel like crying, and all of a sudden she seemed shrunken and tired and old. I crept over to her and put my head against her knee, but she was looking straight ahead of her at something I

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couldn't see, and didn't notice me. I felt terribly lonesome, but I didn't dare say anything to her. I was only a child, but I knew she was hurt and that I couldn't help her. God forgive me, I think I hated my father just then. You see I was too young to understand that even good men have queer ways of being kind to women. By-and-by I knew I had to cry, and I couldn't cry before a strange, still grandmother like that, so I ran out to where Mother was baking bread in the kitchen and threw myself into her arms and sobbed and sobbed. It was a long time before I could get my breath, but when I did I told her about Father and the wheel and the look on Grandmother's face. I can see Mother now. She was the most placid, good-natured of women. Everybody loved her, and she was 'Aunt Nellie' to every one in the country round; but she wasn't amiable

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because she hadn't any spirit, not by any means. Father was the dominant member of the family and Mother humoured him and loved him and thought he was the most wonderful man in the world; but she had opinions of her own and she had a way of saying 'Robin!' that always made Father stop and think.

"Her face was flushed from the heat of the fire as she stood there in the kitchen, but it grew pinker and pinker as I told her the story of the wheel, and her blue eyes filled with angry tears.

"“Oh, these men, these stupid men!” she said, wiping her floury hands on her apron. ‘Now stop crying, child. Grandmother shall have her wheel.’

“She hurried off upstairs, forgetting all about the bread in the oven. I think that was the only time a batch of bread was ever burned to a crisp in our house.

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“After a long time I heard Father’s voice in the living-room and pretty soon he and Mother came out to the kitchen together. She had been crying and I rather think he had, too, and he was looking sheepish but very much relieved. They didn’t pay any attention to me, but before I stole away to Grandmother I heard him say: ‘I’m sorry, Nellie,’ and Mother laid her hand on his sleeve and patted it. ‘I know, Robin,’ she said. ‘You meant it well, but men will never learn that a woman, old or young, can stand any kind of work better than she can stand a hurt.’

“I didn’t think much about that saying then, but I’ve understood it since.

“When I went back to the living-room Grandmother was sitting with her hand on her wheel, but she wasn’t spinning, and her eyes had a far-away look in them. I don’t know whether

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she was looking forward into eternity or back along the years, but I was glad when she smiled at me and said: 'Well, baby?'

"My world seemed straightened out then.

"It was only a few months later that she had to give up her straight-backed chair and lie in her bed, but she told me stories, and I still ran to her the moment I entered the house.

"‘I’m going away on a long journey, child,’ she said one night. ‘Will you be very good when I am gone?’

"I was too much excited over the news to feel very badly about her going.

"‘Will you bring me something?’ I asked. Children are selfish little things. Grandmother smiled. She never misunderstood.

"‘I’ll ask for something for you, Dearie,’ she said.

"I reckon she has asked for it."

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The Little Old Lady's eyes are dimmed and she wipes her glasses very carefully before she speaks again.

"Now that's what I call a *real* grandmother," she says at last. "I'm glad I was a child before they went out of fashion."

CHAPTER II

She Recalls the Greek Slave

SALLY! Sally!"

The sweet thin voice was more highly pitched than usual. Excitement thrilled through it.

With fright clutching at her heart the daughter-in-law dropped the linen she had been sorting and hurried to the room at the end of the long hall, only to meet reassurance in the doorway. The Little Old Lady was sitting in her own comfortable chair by the window, the morning paper in her hands. Her cheeks were glowing, her dear face was crinkled from brow to chin with smiles, her eyes which after so many years of watching the world's

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ways still looked out at life with child-like confidence, were mirrors for happy memories.

“Sally”—the voice trembled with emotion—“Powers’s ‘Greek Slave’ was sold yesterday—sold right here in town!”

For once the daughter’s loving understanding failed. How should a young woman of this generation know anything about Powers’s “Greek Slave”? If it had been Rodin’s “Balzac,” now, or even that militant antique, MacMonnies’ “Bacchante”—but “Powers” and a “Greek Slave”! Luckily her eloquent silence went unnoticed.

“The critics don’t seem to speak very highly of it”—the fluting voice held a note of indignation—“but it is a very wonderful statue. My husband admired it greatly.”

There was finality in the statement. So far as Robert Dale’s wife was con-

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cerned the status of the "Greek Slave" was fixed for all eternity.

"Did you ever see it yourself, Mother?" The daughter had her clew now but she was treading cautiously.

A little cloud of embarrassment drifted across the face under the snowy cap, but smiles broke through and gave birth to a delectable, chuckling laugh, the laugh with which the Little Old Lady always acknowledged a joke upon herself and took her hearer into her confidence about her own foibles.

"Well, I glanced at it once. I can't really say that I saw it."

She leaned back in her chair, let the paper drop into her lap and smiled into the far-away that was always so close to her, while the daughter sat down beside her and waited. By winding and hallowed ways of memory a story was coming out of that far-away, and little Louise was

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not the only one in the family who loved her grandmother's stories.

"You see I was only seventeen." Memory had wandered at last into speech. "I'm afraid you can't understand, Sally. Things were different when I was seventeen. You had been about everywhere when you were that age, and Louise—well it worries me sometimes to think of all that Louise will probably know when she is seventeen; but I was just a child. I had never been farther away from home than Madison and we lived only twelve miles from there. There were no papers for us then and few books, and Mother and Father had very strict ideas of what should be talked about before young girls.

"I suppose it wouldn't do to bring up girls that way now, even down there in the country. It surely wouldn't here in New York. I can see that even with my old eyes. Times

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have changed and conditions have changed and girls have to live in the new times and face the new conditions; but I'm sorry for them, Sally, just as I'm sorry for the new women who are so proud of their newness. Bless their hearts! They are splendid, girls and women! But as for their being finer types than the women and girls of long ago, or happier than they—oh, well, I suppose I'm prejudiced. The old life and the old conditions look better to me.

“And, whether you like old-fashioned girls or not, I was a very old-fashioned little girl at seventeen—shy and demure and respectful to my elders, and modest, as modesty was understood then, and honest and loving. A little bit sentimental, I'm afraid, and more worried about eternal punishment than was absolutely necessary; but on the whole a happy, healthy, well-behaved child with a

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good deal of courage under my quiet ways.

“If I hadn’t had courage I should never have married Robert right after my seventeenth birthday. Not that it took courage to want to marry him. I was too ignorant to know that I needed courage for that; but Father and Mother were bitterly opposed to it and I was an obedient child, and I had to be very brave to beg for my own way in the face of their disapproval. I thought they were unreasonable then, but, dearie me, how well I’ve understood them since; and how I have pitied them!

“I remember, when my little girl was a baby—Robert sat holding her one evening. She was a delicate little thing and he thought the world of her. Our boys never meant so much to him. She had been ailing and fretful all that day and after supper he had taken her from me and petted her and sung to

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her until she fell asleep. I was sewing on the opposite side of the hearth, and, when I happened to look across at him, his eyes were full of tears. He was a strong, self-controlled man and it frightened me to see him like that, so I dropped my sewing on the floor and ran to him.

“‘Oh, Robert, what is it?’ I asked—very low, for I didn’t want to wake the baby. He winked away the tears and laughed at me.

“‘It’s nothing, Dear,’ he said, ‘only I was thinking of Uncle Robin.’ He always called my father ‘Uncle Robin’. ‘I was an awful brute to him,’ he went on. ‘Why, if a strange man should come to me when this little girl is seventeen and insist upon carrying her away to the ends of the earth with him, I’d shoot him in his tracks.’

“Time and experience do make a difference in one’s ideas about marrying, don’t they? But Robert and I

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were determined to marry that summer, and marry we did. It turned out happily, too, but I know now what desperate chances I took. Mother and Father knew then. That's the difference.

“If I didn't know, too, it wasn't for want of telling. Everybody begged and persuaded and warned and prophesied disaster. Mother and Father didn't say much about the chances of Robert's proving to be a rascal. I reckon they knew I wouldn't listen, and down in their hearts they believed in him too; but they said I was too young to marry, and I was. I wasn't fitted to be a wife or a mother. I wasn't trained for a helpmate. I knew nothing of life or of the world. I couldn't bake or sew or spin. I had never even bought a dress or a bonnet for myself. Mother and Father were perfectly right. I ought not to have married so young—

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and I've thanked God every day since that I did it. If I hadn't I'd have missed some of my years with Robert, and they were so few even as it was! Only twenty years, my dear, and then this long, long waiting; but they were years of perfect happiness. I wonder how many couples who celebrated their golden wedding anniversary together can count as much.

"No; Mother and Father didn't try to make me distrust Robert, but some of the others did. I had an Aunt Peggy. She wasn't really my aunt, but I had always called her that, and she loved me, but she was a blunt, outspoken, bitter sort of woman. Life hadn't been kind to Aunt Peggy and love had failed her. She was furious about my marrying, and said that if she were Father she would order Robert off the premises and shut me up until I would listen to reason. Perhaps it was a good thing that Aunt

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Peggy never had the children she wanted—or perhaps she would have been different if she had had them. Every time she could get hold of me she would fairly beat Jeremiah with her wailing about awful things ahead of me. She didn't spare me a single calamity she could imagine. Some of the very first knowledge of the world's evil I ever got came from those harangues of Aunt Peggy's.

“She told me that I didn't know a thing about Robert, that any man could conceal his real nature while he was courting, but that he had lived for twenty-nine years before we ever saw him and had gone to and fro out in the sinful world. She hadn't a doubt but that he had made friends with the mammon of unrighteousness. She told me some things I had never known about the same mammon and about girls she had known who had married men with pasts and found it

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out too late. She reminded me that Robert wore jewelry, 'a seal ring and watch chain, Sally!', that he had confessed to having attended the theatre, and she was sure there were sinkholes of iniquity in his life that none of us had ever heard of. No young man could live in a worldly Babylon like Buffalo and keep himself unspotted from the world; and when Robert wasn't in Buffalo he was in Canada. That was even worse. Somebody had told Aunt Peggy that all the folks in Canada were English and had English ways, and that every one of them drank and played cards. Canada was as far away from us then as the Philippines seem now—farther—and it was easy to believe anything about such a remote part of the world.

"I stood all that pretty well, though I was a bit scared about the drinking and card playing, for I had been brought up to think that any one who

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did those things was damned. Of course I didn't believe Robert did either of them, but it seemed dreadful to have neighbours who were so godless. Still I wasn't much impressed, and if Aunt Peggy had stopped there I would have forgiven her; but she didn't. She went on to say that Mother and Father were crazy and so was I, and that it would serve us all right if it turned out that Robert had another wife somewhere, as he probably had, and if I had to come back home disgraced for life.

"Sally, I forgot all my early training, all my respect for my elders. I was so blazing mad that I stamped my foot at her and told her she was a wicked, nasty-minded old woman, and that I'd never speak to her again as long as I lived, and that I hoped I'd never see her again. It was a shocking exhibition. I'd always been a quiet, prettily mannered little girl,

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and she was so surprised that she just sat with her mouth open and stared at me till I ran out of the house crying. I didn't speak to her again before I married and went away; but she was with me when my third baby came; and she used to tell me that no woman in the world deserved as good a husband as I had, but that it was a case of 'a fool for luck.'

"I didn't believe a thing she had said or hinted about Robert, but I suppose things like that stick somewhere in one's mind and wait for a chance to jump out and make faces. Well, I was married in spite of all the opposition, and, though I was sorry to leave Mother and Father and the others, I loved Robert so that I hadn't the faintest shadow of a misgiving. Now that I am old I cry a little sometimes over the innocence and faith of that foolish little bride. It was all very foolish and very rash, and I won-

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der that my mother could kiss me good-by and bless me with a smile on her face. She was a brave woman, my mother.

“Our trunks had been sent ahead by wagon and we rode to Madison alone, I in a little blue bonnet and my blue cloth travelling dress, with a riding skirt over it. I had felt that I would rather say my good-byes there at home, so we left all the dear home folks standing by the gate on which I had loved to swing just a few years before. They were still standing there when we turned to wave a last good-by from the top of the hill, but Mother’s face was hidden on Father’s shoulder and his arm was around her. I was her baby—and Canada was a far country.

“It was a wonderful ride, dear, out of my old world into a new one, and I hadn’t a doubt, not a doubt. Dear Lord, the bravery of the young who

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are in love! Our horses were old mates and didn't mind travelling close together and stopping often—and the sunshine, and the birds, and the brooks! I think all the world knew it was my wedding day and wished me joy."

The story halted there, while the Little Old Lady rode the Southern hills again and her lover leaned to kiss the child face that the blue bonnet framed.

"It was a long time ago," she said softly, after she had dreamed awhile. Dear Lord, the bravery of the old who have lost what they loved!

"There were friends at the wharf in Madison to see us off." The story was flowing on again now. "And the man from home who had taken our luggage over and was to lead our horses back was there, too. I think the first time I fully realized what I was doing was when I stood on the

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steamer deck beside Robert and saw a strip of water widening between the boat and the shore; and I remember being thankful that Father and Mother were not waving to me from the wharf. It seemed to me I couldn't have stood that. I'd have pulled through pretty well, though, if it hadn't been for my horse, Dixie. Father had given him to me when he was a colt. I had broken him, ridden him, loved him. He meant home and all the girl life there; and when John Ammons, our farm hand, led him away up the street, I crumpled up against Robert and clung to him and cried against his coat collar.

“‘I'll make it up to you, little girl,’ he said. ‘I'll make it up to you; and if ever I fail to be good to you I deserve to be shot as full of holes as a sieve.’ His voice was choky, but he began telling me about the friends we were going to visit in Cincinnati and

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about the wedding trip we were going to have on the canal boat to Toledo—there wasn't a railroad then, you know, and I'm glad there wasn't—and I soon cheered up and was hungry for supper. Dear me, but that steamboat supper seemed elegant to me! I was afraid of the waiter, but I don't think he knew it. People used to say Robert spoiled me, Sally; spared me everything, kept me too childish. I reckon he did; but you see, for him I was always the little girl who cut all her anchors, burned all her bridges, and set sail into a strange world with him on that old Ohio River boat. He never got through 'making it up' to me."

"He must have been a good man," murmured Sally.

"He was the best man in the world!" The Little Old Lady said it solemnly, but close on the heels of the solemnity came a laugh.

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"He was the best man in the world," she repeated; "but there was a time, there in Cincinnati, when I had awful misgivings about him. That's where the 'Greek Slave' comes in."

Her eyes were twinkling now. She had put away sadness.

"It was this way," she explained. "I had never seen Robert with people of his own kind, people of culture and worldly experience. He was so adaptable that he had fitted perfectly into our life and I didn't know any other; but when we went to his Cincinnati friends I realized the gulf between his world and mine, and I don't mind confessing that it was a good deal of a shock. Not that every one wasn't nice to me. Anything sweeter and kinder than those Carters I've never seen. They acted as though they were as much in love with me as Robert was; but I wasn't such a goose

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that I couldn't see my own social shortcomings, and I couldn't help worrying for fear Robert would be mortified by them. When I found out that he read French, and when I heard Mr. Carter and him talk about books and music and things like that, I felt so ignorant that it almost broke my heart, and my old serene confidence in our happy future was considerably shaken up.

"We went to the theatre—'Uncle Tom's Cabin' it was—and I never enjoyed anything else so much as I enjoyed that play; but every time I thought of Father my conscience pricked me, and Robert talked about the theatre so that I knew he must have gone a great deal. Worse than that Mr. Carter said something one morning that proved he and Robert had been in the habit of playing cards together. That was almost more than I could bear. Seems funny to you,

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doesn't it, Sally? It does to me now, but it was all very serious to that seventeen-year-old bride.

"I tried not to worry, and when I found that I couldn't succeed in that I tried not to let Robert know that I was worrying, and I was radiantly happy between whiles; so he didn't suspect that anything was wrong until the day before we left Cincinnati. Everybody had been talking about a famous statue that was on exhibition in one of the galleries, and Robert had said that we must surely see it. The 'Greek Slave' it was called, and an American sculptor named Powers had made it. America wasn't very rich in home-made art then and Americans weren't so sophisticated and hard to please as they are now. This statue had made a great sensation, even among people who had seen the best art of the world; so I was crazy to see it, too, though I had never in my life

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seen a statue of any kind and didn't know a blessed thing about art.

"We didn't get around to it until that last day; but then Mr. and Mrs. Carter and Robert and I went down to the gallery. I had on my best afternoon dress and bonnet—changeable blue and gold silk—and a new watch and chain that Robert had given me, and I was so happy that my feet wanted to dance instead of walk. We went into the building and along a hall and through a door and then, suddenly, I saw it!

"The only thing in the room—white against dark walls—a woman, stark, staring naked, Sally!

"Oh, my dear, my dear! You can't know. How could you? You've been brought up on nude statues. Louise has pictures of them in her schoolbooks and her teachers take her to see whole roomfuls of them. But—every fibre of me quivered under

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the shock. I took just that one first look, then stood still with my eyes tight shut. The blood was surging into my face and beating at my ears. It seemed to me that if I didn't have something to hold to I would drop. I reached out for Robert, but he wasn't there. He had gone right forward toward the horrible thing without even noticing that I had stopped, and as I stood there, sick with shame, I heard his voice:

“‘Gracious Heavens, what a beautiful thing!’ he said. ‘What a piece of work! Don’t tell me we Americans haven’t got it in us, Carter.’

“I felt dizzy. I couldn’t believe my ears. He wasn’t surprised. He wasn’t horrified. He didn’t mind my seeing it. He liked it! Probably he had seen worse ones.

“I wanted to look at him, but I couldn’t without seeing the creature. I did open my eyes though, and raised

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them just a little so that I could see the base of the pedestal the statue stood on. I could see what Robert was doing, too. I knew him by his trousers. He was right up close to the thing and walking around it!

“‘Look at that shoulder, Carter,’ he was saying. ‘And the line of that back and hip. Perfect! Absolutely perfect!’

“It was more than I could stand. I had believed in him so utterly, had pinned all my faith to him, had been so sure that he would shield me from everything harmful, had given up everything and everybody for him; and I had been mistaken in him all the time. He wasn’t good. He wasn’t pure. All the warnings I had laughed at came flooding back to me. Aunt Peggy’s prophecies jumped out from the corner of my brain where they had been hiding. Maybe all the rest was true. He *had* lived in Buffalo and

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he had gone to theatres and he had played cards and he could take me to look at a statue of a shameless woman with no clothes on, and could walk around it and praise it. Maybe he did have another wife somewhere. How could I tell? And it was too late now. I wouldn't believe any one. I would marry him—and I had married a monster!

“My heart swelled almost to bursting point and the tears began to slide down my cheeks. Yes, you can laugh at her. I can laugh at her now myself; but there's something very pitiful about her, when you stop to think—so young and so very ignorant and so helplessly dependent upon the good faith of one mere man.”

There were tears in the Little Old Lady's own eyes as she looked back at the weeping little bride in her blue-and-gold silk frock and bonnet; but laughter was shining through the mist.

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“Little imbecile!” she said tenderly. “That was the only unhappy time in my whole married life, Sally, the only time I was unhappy because of my husband, I mean. I was soul sick, shocked to the core, outraged, frightened beyond the understanding of any modern girl; but I was proud, too, and ashamed to cry in public; so I slipped out into the shadowy hall, and Robert found me sobbing in the darkest corner under the stairs when he came out to look for me.

“He was astonished at first, just for a moment. Then he understood. He was the sort of a man who could understand, God bless him! He didn’t scold, he didn’t tease, he didn’t argue, he didn’t even go back to find the Carters. He just tucked me under his arm, left a message with the doorkeeper, called a carriage, and took me home. Some way or other I couldn’t feel that he was a monster

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when my head was against his coat sleeve and he was holding my hand tight under the lap robe.

“Even when we were alone in our own room he didn’t try to prove that I was silly. That wasn’t Robert’s way. He sat down in a big chair and took me in his arms and said: ‘You poor child, you poor frightened child! What a brute I was not to realize!’ You see he *did* understand.

“But when I had cried my cry out, and was quiet and comforted, he tried to make me understand something about the purpose of art, tried very patiently and tenderly to make me see that purity is a matter of soul, not of cloth, and that beauty and truth may go naked in art, though clothes are an accepted convention in our society. I didn’t understand it all. I don’t yet. Youthful habits of mind hold one, and I like my statues and pictures draped; but in the end I did

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understand that one might admire a nude statue without being impure in heart or mind, and that Aunt Peggy was no sort of a prophet.

“I was quite happy by the time the Carters came home; but do you know, Sally, I had cried such spots on the front of that silk dress that Robert had to get me a new one in Buffalo? —rose and lavender with a little sprig through it, much prettier than the other and made in the very latest city fashion. After that I couldn’t even bear the ‘Greek Slave’ a grudge.

“I wish I had known she was on exhibition last week. I’d like to have one real good look at her.”

CHAPTER III

What She Misses by Living in a New York Flat

THE Little Old Lady will never be reconciled to the way of life in a New York flat.

She admits that; but she can be happy where love is, and, since she has called it "home," our little eyrie is so full of love that the precious stuff oozes out into the halls and finds its way down to the dark and grimy fastnesses where a surly and none too temperate janitor lurks and growls.

Didn't the Little Old Lady herself venture boldly into that same remote and awesome region, the last time the janitor got drunk and beat his wife?

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Didn't she doctor the poor woman's bruises of heart and body? And then, standing straight and fearless and dainty among the boilers and coal bins and high-piled débris, and looking like a pocket-edition accusing angel, didn't she lovingly but unsparingly read the riot act to that burly, half-drunk Irishman until he blubbered like a bad but remorseful small boy and made pledges which he actually kept?

"But you must promise me that you won't go down to that brute again, Mother," said the head of the family, when the Little Old Lady came back pink-cheeked, excited, optimistic, from her secret expedition and told where she had been.

She did not promise.

She only looked at him indulgently and said, with a serene smile:

"Robert, I have met many men under many conditions during my life,

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and I have never found one who deserved to be called a brute."

She never will meet one. The man beneath the brute will always answer to her call.

When she goes out of the house the coloured hall boys and elevator boys fall over each other in their eagerness to be of service to her. She knows all about their families and their best girls and their aspirations, and she doctors their colds and toothaches, and she sends them saucers of ice cream when there is any left from dinner, and she has wheedled Bella, coloured cook, into seeing that the night boy always has a cup of hot coffee before he goes off duty in the chill gray of the early morning.

Toward Bella herself the Little Old Lady is kindly but firm, so firm that the other members of the family marvel at her courage, and allow her the privilege of breaking to the dusky

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handmaiden all tidings calculated to ruffle an uncertain Afro-American temper. The kitchen lion lies down like a lamb when the Little Old Lady deals with her.

As for the family—well, the family, from Misery the cat, who “loves company” well but loves the Little Old Lady better, to the man who does sometimes come home from business with nerves that need soothing, all are the devoted slaves of Granny.

Yes, we call her “Granny.” She likes it. There’s an old-fashioned homeliness about the word that matches her caps and her kerchiefs and her spirit.

But, with all our loving, the Little Old Lady is not content. She yearns for neighbours. She wants friendly folks to run in unceremoniously with news of all the little happenings in their homes. She wants to be called into consultation about children’s

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ailments and about domestic problems, to send arrowroot jelly and broths to invalids, to share the hopes and joys and sorrows and fresh cookies of the fellow-humans who live 'round about her—and she girds against the walls that an unnatural mode of life has built up between her and those for whom her heart has room, no matter what they may be.

One afternoon, when she had been sitting quietly by the window looking down into a street that teemed with nurses and perambulators, she sighed wistfully.

“To think,” she said, “that there are babies being born every minute in this town and that I haven’t a blessed thing to do with warming flannels for any of them.”

That is just it. She longs to have a hand in the warming of flannels for all the material and spiritual babies in the world.

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And the rest of us, who would not dream of speaking to any of the other tenants in the house for fear they might not be above reproach, haven't the heart to reason with the Little Old Lady when she nods smilingly across the court to the plump woman whose hair is too blond and whose kimono is too gay, but who has a window-box of which she takes tender care; or when she stops a nurse and a baby in the hall to inquire about the mumps with which the baby's sister is wrestling, or even when she exclaims in distress over the cough of a pink-shirted, check-suited, fishy-eyed man who happens to go up in the elevator with her, and tells him just how to have his wife make onion sirup for him.

It was on a spring day, when the trees and shrubs were budding in Riverside Park and a little April breeze was setting the surface of the

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river aquiver and a host of children were shouting for joy along the paths and on the greening lawns, that the Little Old Lady's neighbourly heart received its deepest wound.

She had been out for a walk in the park with Louise, her namesake and favourite grandchild, and she came home better attuned to the lilt of the spring than was the fourteen-year-old granddaughter.

As they left the elevator she noticed scattered leaves on the hall floor, and, always a careful housewife, she turned in the doorway for a mild reproof.

"The hall is not quite tidy, James," she said.

James, the elevator boy, smiled apologetically.

"No'm. It ain't skasely. I'm go-in' to see to that right away. The funeral it made consid'ble mess 'n' I ain' had time yet," he said.

"What funeral?" the Little Old

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Lady asked, with a startled look in her eyes.

"Mister Bellows, 'm—in there." He pointed to a door an arm's length from the one in which she was standing.

"Yass'm. He's bin sick nigh five weeks 'n' he died las' Monday. The Masons they buried him fine, this mornin'. They all brought heaps o' flowers. Yass'm, they suttinly did do him fine."

The Little Old Lady fled through the open door without a word and did not stop until she had reached her own room and closed its door behind her. Even Louise did not try to follow her. She knew there *were* times when Granny wanted to be alone.

We found her sitting in her arm-chair when, a little later, we went into her room. She had taken off her bonnet and coat and smoothed her hair and put on her snowy cap, but

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she did not look quite like the Little Old Lady. She had no smile for us and her eyes held a hurt and she seemed very tired.

"You've done too much, dear," said her daughter-in-law, gently.

A flush crept into the white face. The Little Old Lady's backbone stiffened with a snap.

"Done too much, Sally? I've done too little. That's what hurts. I haven't done my Christian duty. Right beyond that wall"—she pointed at the rose-flowered wall of her little bedroom—"there's been sickness and suffering and death. Just the other side of that wall, Sally. I've been sitting here snug and happy, and not six feet away from me a woman's heart's been breaking. I've been lying down peacefully to sleep every night, and in there she's been fighting for her husband's life—and losing the fight, poor soul. And I never helped.

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I never so much as said a prayer for her. I never even knew, Sally. I can't live this way. It's wicked. It's inhuman. It's monstrous. God never intended it.

"When I think that maybe there are dozens of women in this one big house, under the same roof with me, needing sympathy and love and help as much as the woman in there does, it seems as if I'd go crazy.

"I reckon I'll either have to get at them or go away somewhere where I won't feel them tugging at me."

Her voice was choked. There were tears running down her cheeks.

"But, Mother, they have their own families and friends."

The Little Old Lady looked at her daughter-in-law across a gulf.

"You don't understand, child—not yet. Maybe you never will, for you've never known what real neighbours are—but families and friends

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aren't enough. One needs humanity, Sally. It's the everlasting fellowship that counts. If Christ had just loved Mary and Joseph He wouldn't have done much for the world.

"It's loving out beyond your very own that tells—loving out and out and out as far as you can reach, and there's no telling how far love *will* reach. And neighbouring is the beginning of it. God help the world when neighbouring dies out!"

Louise had dropped on the floor beside the Little Old Lady's chair and laid her smooth cheek against one of the slender, wrinkled, old hands.

"But what do they do when they neighbour, Granny?" she asked.

"You poor ignorant child," said Granny; but a smile crept into her eyes and it sweetened there as memory went back along the years and found old neighbours lingering in the Land of Long Ago.

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“What do they do?” Memory was busy there in the past. “They help each other to live, dear. That’s what they do when they neighbour.”

She was quiet for a while, but one could afford to wait for the Little Old Lady’s stories of that Land of Long Ago.

“I’ve always had good neighbours,” she began at last. “Even after I came North with my husband I found them in Canada, and in Iowa, and wherever we went—but we did not live in cities. I’m glad of that. Yes; we found good neighbours; but when I think of neighbours, some way or other my mind always goes back to southern Indiana. I’ve wondered sometimes whether there was even another place in the world where folks neighboured as they did down there along the Ohio River when I was a girl.

“We lived in the country, you

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know, but there was a village two miles east of Father's farm and another three miles west, and there were plenty of farms close around us. I wish you could have seen it, Sally, before things changed. Robert can remember a little about it, and I—why, in my heart I really live down there now and everything is just as it was then and I love it so, not that I don't like being with you and Robert and the children, Sally, but that was always 'home,' even after I was married and had a home of my own.

“Robert's grandfather was 'Uncle Robin' to all the neighbourhood and Mother was 'Aunt Nellie,' and the hearts of the two of them—I can't tell you about that. It's too big for telling. But someway or other, most every one had a heart down there. I suppose there must have been ornery folks, but I can't remember any, nor any hates nor feuds either. When

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any one stuck fast in trouble all the neighbours put their shoulders to the wheel.

“If a man fell sick in harvest-time, for instance, the neighbours didn’t bother him with asking whether he wanted anything done. They just turned to and harvested his crops. Or if he wasn’t able to get down his wood in the autumn they got it down for him. They all helped each other with harvesting anyway. The man whose field needed attention most got first attention, and if one man had a big crop and another had a small one the man who had the small one never stopped to think about that. Like as not he’d be the one to need most help the next year; and if not, what difference did it make anyway?

“I can remember as plainly as can be one afternoon when I was riding home from the village with Father, and we passed a big field where the

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hay was down. Father stopped his horse and looked at the sky.

“‘Lem’s away to-day buying cattle,’ he said, ‘and that sky looks like a storm. Peggy, you hurry along and tell Uncle Will Conway and Ben Root that we’ll have to get in here and see to Lem’s hay. I’ll get the Robinsons and the Stuart boys on my way home.’

“In half an hour there were a dozen men and five teams in that field and every bit of hay was under cover before the storm broke. That’s neighbouring, child.

“And widows! Why the way widows and orphans were taken care of down there fairly beat the Bible! There was Caroline Reed. Her husband left her without very much money and in poor health and with a little farm on her hands; and the neighbours just took her and the children up and carried them along. The men planted her garden and her pota-

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toes and whatever she wanted to raise, and then they got the things in for her, and they cut and sawed and split her wood and dumped it at her door. Sometimes one man would haul a load over and sometimes another would. And I can remember when Grandmother would be warping a web of stuff for our dresses, or for Father's and the boys' clothes, she'd say to Mother: 'Nellie, don't you think I'd better add a few yards to what we're going to need of this and have it for Caroline's children? She isn't fit to weave, and winter's coming on.'

"And Mother would say: 'Why, yes, do, Mother.'

"The other women in the neighbourhood would do the same sort of thing, and they'd dry fruit and vegetables—nobody canned anything then, you know—and smoke hams and bacon and put salt pork in brine,

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and send it all along to Caroline. And it never occurred to them or to Caroline, either, that what they were doing was charity. It wasn't. It was neighbouring. Caroline had money enough to get along, but she was sick and she was a widow, and folks just didn't want her to have to bother about things. Somebody used to run in twice a week and do her baking for her and clean up more thoroughly than she and the oldest little girl could.

"But then that was nothing unusual. Whenever there was sickness or trouble anywhere the neighbour women would go right in and do the work. They'd bake and cook at home and send in everything so that there wasn't need of any fuss and cooking going on where the sickness was, and they'd take turns nursing. There weren't any trained nurses then and I expect maybe trained nurses are bet-

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ter; but there was an awful lot of heart in that old-fashioned nursing, and Aunt Jeruskha Evans could grab a person right out of the jaws of death if anybody could.

“No matter how long the sickness lasted the neighbours didn’t get tired—or, if they did, they never said so.

“Once a man with a wife and a baby moved into a little house down by the creek. Strangers they were and they hadn’t any more than settled before the man took sick. Well, the neighbour men went down to look after him and the women sent down some roast chickens and bread and pies and things, but when they got the doctor over from Paris—the nearest town—he said the man had smallpox.

“That was a good deal of a jolt even for real neighbourly folks, and some were scared half to death and stayed away, but not all the neighbours. No, indeed! My big brother Joe heard

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the news and came hurrying home to tell Father and Mother about it.

“‘I’m going down to take care of him,’ he said.

“Mother turned kind of white and looked at Father, and Father was still for a minute. Then he said:

“‘That’s right, Son. I’ll spell you with him.’

“But they didn’t let him do it. He was old then and not very strong, and I think at least a dozen younger men volunteered for the nursing. The sick man got well and no one else had the smallpox, but you see they went a long way in their neighbouring down there. Somehow or other nobody minded taking help or giving it. Maybe one of us children would be ailing and fretting, and Mother would be trying to get her baking done, and in would come Mrs. Bannerman or Mrs. Abbot. She’d take a look at things, and then she’d walk over to the closet

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where Mother kept her kitchen aprons and get one out and tie it on.

“‘You go along and look after that baby, Nellie,’ she’d say. ‘I’ll get this bread in for you.’

“She’d mix the bread and put it in the oven; and, if there were pies or doughnuts or cakes on hand, she’d toss them together, too, and when it was all done she’d wash her hands and take off her apron and go home as if she’d only been making a pleasant call.

“There weren’t any needy in that neighbourhood. Nobody was allowed to need—not if the neighbours knew it, and they generally did. And the part of it that seems queer to me, now that I’ve been out in the world, though it seemed as natural as breathing then, is that nobody thought he deserved credit for what he did for the others. It was just neighbouring and that was all there was to it.

OUR LITTLE OLD LADY

Mighty close to Scripture the neighbouring was, back home.

"Once when I was a little girl I was sitting on the back porch with Father, and Mr. Gasway came through the calf lot and sat down on the steps.

"That's a fine field of turnips you've got across the creek, Robin,' he said.

"Yes,' said Father. 'They've done well. Help yourself to them when you want any, Will.'

"Oh, I've been doing that,' said Mr. Gasway.

"It didn't strike either one of them as funny that he hadn't waited to be told he could do it.

"Queer I should remember that, but I remember more and more about those days. They seem more real than this living in New York does. Sometimes I think I'm dreaming this and living that.

"Neighbours? Why, I remember

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once Mother was putting dinner on the table. There were two big roast chickens and I was terribly hungry. I can smell those chickens now. Just then Aunt Lucy Hooper came tearing in at the kitchen door, all out of breath and red in the face, and she grabbed the platter, chickens and all.

“‘Nellie,’ she said, ‘I need these chickens. Hiram Phelps and Susan have just come and they’ve got to push on to Indianapolis in a hurry. Her mother’s sick there. I haven’t got time to kill chickens and he can’t eat ham since he had that stomach trouble.’

“Off she went across the orchard with our chickens, and Mother laughed and fried some ham.”

The Little Old Lady’s face was sweet, with a sweetness half smiles, half tears.

“Sometimes I do miss it so,” she said. “I want folks to come close.”

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Louise snuggled closer, but no one spoke. It hurt to know that the Little Old Lady was lonely.

"I was down there when my first baby died," she said after a long pause; and then, after a pause still longer: "Oh, they *were* good neighbours!"

She lifted Louise's head gently from her knee, rose and straightened her cap strings before the mirror.

"I'm going in to see the woman beyond the wall," she said, as she left the room; and even the daughter-in-law who had always lived in New York spoke not a word of protest.

CHAPTER IV

She Tells a Beautiful Story of Having Company Down Home

THE man of the family had brought a friend home with him for dinner.

That was quite as it should be. His wife's cheerful brow showed no sign of a furrow, but her mind was suddenly ravaged by wrinkles, and a few moments later Bella, the cook, went surging like a dark tempest cloud up the hill to Broadway and the nearest delicatessen and catering shops.

Dinner was a few minutes late, but it was irreproachable. There was an entrée, and the steak was

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smothered in mushrooms, and the ice cream came up the dumb-waiter just in time to follow upon the heels of the salad.

And when the well-fed and smiling guest had departed, and the well-fed and smiling host was about to settle down to a last cigar and an evening paper the hostess made a wholly excusable bid for appreciation and praise. She was a good manager and an amiable wife and she wanted someone to tell her so.

"Bella's really wonderful in an emergency," she said contentedly. "I don't see how she does it when there's so much of her to set in motion, but at a time like to-night I forgive her all the breakfasts she burns and the dishes she breaks and the temper she shows. If I can think fast enough and order fast enough she can do things fast enough, and it's such a comfort! Nobody could have guessed

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it was wash day and we weren't going to have anything except soup and steak and potatoes. Everything was lovely, wasn't it, Mother?"

The Little Old Lady smiled assent. She never failed any one who turned to her for sympathy.

"As nice a dinner as any man could want, Sally," she said with enthusiasm. "You and Bella certainly are a pair when it comes to emergencies."

She was most satisfactory, but her smile had more than commendation in it and the daughter-in-law met it with a smile of her own. People always smiled back at the Little Old Lady.

"Well?" said the younger woman.

The Little Old Lady coloured up like a child caught in mischief. Then she chuckled.

"You *are* a splendid manager, Sally," she said. "You surely are. I wasn't smiling at you. It was just

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the whole situation that tickled me—and the whole way of living that the situation means. I was trying to imagine Mother sending somebody scrambling out to buy provisions every time an extra person dropped in for a meal. That's what made me laugh. I can't get used to it, Sally. Honestly, I can't, but it doesn't scandalize me the way it did. You and Robert never knew how I felt about it right at first. You see I didn't realize then that everybody lived that way in New York, and I had thought Robert was doing real well down here; and when I came on to you—why, I was perfectly heart-broken over you. I cried when I was in bed, nights, and I made it a subject for prayer, but I didn't seem able to pray my way through it."

"Why, Mother!" The daughter-in-law's tone was distressed, bewildered, incredulous.

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The Little Old Lady laughed.

“Oh, bless your heart, it didn’t last more than a few days. I got my bearings then and saw that there were millions of New York flats and not a decent-sized pantry in one of them. Somebody else just naturally has to keep your provisions for you. I understand that now, but isn’t it awful!”

The distress had faded from the daughter’s face, but the bewilderment lingered. New York ways were the only ways she knew. The Little Old Lady realized that and made concession to her ignorance.

“Of course it doesn’t seem awful to you, dearie. You never lived in the country. I reckon even in the country folks don’t live now as they did when I was a girl back home; but, you see, I can’t get rid of my old ideas and standards, and every time I see Bella whipping off to buy a

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pint of cream or a loaf of bread or a pound of butter because company's come I think about the way folks dropped in on us down in Southern Indiana, and I have to laugh. I can't help, it, Sally. You'd laugh, too, if you had ever lived the old way. Can't you remember anything about your grandpa's, Robert?"

The head of the family had put aside his paper.

"Not much," he said, "only that it was a heavenly place for a very small boy, and that Grandmother was an angel and the cooky-jar was never empty."

"Empty! Well, I should say not—not so long as there were grandchildren or neighbours' children to make cookies for! But even when you were down there things were changed from what they had been when I was a child.

"The way-back times are the ones

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I love best to think about, the times before Grandmother left us, and before Father was crippled, and before my older sisters married, and before we began buying dress goods instead of weaving them, and cooking on a cook stove instead of in the big fireplace and the brick ovens.

“Why, we hardly bought anything then except coffee and tea and a few other such things.

“Mother dried all kinds of fruit and vegetables. Better than the canned ones they were, too. There was a regular drying house with great perforated trays and a sort of furnace beneath them; and when we were getting the fruit ready for drying the neighbour women came in to help, and stayed for supper, and in the evening the young folks came for a party.

“Then there were gallons and gallons of preserves and pickles put

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up in stone jars, and Father raised enough winter vegetables to feed a regiment, and in the winter the cellar bins were always full of apples and pears. We didn't eat as much fresh meat as you do, though the neighbours took turns killing and divided the meat: but there were always more chickens and turkeys and ducks and geese than we could use; and I wish you could have seen the smokehouse. It hung full of hams and sides of bacon and smoked beef—home-cured over hickory chip and corncob fires. Father wouldn't use any other kind of fuel for the smokehouse fires. I don't get any such hams and bacon now. There were barrels and barrels of salt pork and corned beef in the cellar, and always a barrel of flour in the pantry. Our grain went to the mill when the wheat flour or cornmeal ran low. No wonder your corn pone isn't what it ought to be, Sally, with

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the meal standing on grocery shelves for goodness knows how long.

“We made our own sugar, too—maple it was; and every spring, when the sap begins to run, I get such a hungering to be down there in the sugar bush, helping Father, that it seems as if I can’t stand it.

“There’s another thing that makes me mortally homesick, too. That’s the mint you put in the sauce when you have lamb. The smell of it always chokes me up. That’s why I don’t eat lamb, Sally. It isn’t that I don’t like it.

“You see we had a big springhouse. Everybody did down home. We went down a little slope of it, from the kitchen door, and even on the hottest days it was cool in there. All the pans of milk and pitchers of cream and jars of butter were set on flat stones with the water running around them, and when melons were ripe

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we used to pick some in the early morning of each day and put them in the springhouse to cool. Then, whenever we felt like it, we children would go down and cut open a melon and eat it, and there were always the cool gurgling sound of the water and the smell of wet growing things like mint and pennyroyal in the air. It seems kind of pitiful to have to depend on an ice-box, Sally.

“We kept bees, too. I ’most forgot to tell you that. We children loved honey and it was always on the table for every meal, but nobody except Mother could take the honey out of the hives. Even the bees loved Mother and wouldn’t sting her.

“Well, you see, with stores like that always on hand and four good cooks in the family company hadn’t any terrors for us. Company? Why, folks don’t know anything about company nowadays!

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"I can remember parties of ten or twelve dropping in on us unexpectedly and nobody upset over it, either. Crowds like that would come riding up from Kentucky to spend a few days or a week with us, and sometimes they'd ride over from nearby Indiana towns, and we were always delighted when they'd draw up in front of the house, laughing and calling to us. Nowadays visitors have to wait to be invited and give notice weeks ahead, and then, like as not, they aren't really welcome, and everybody in the family is cross because they've come, and relieved when they go; but we didn't know anything about that kind of entertaining at Father's. Everybody was welcome, and the more the merrier.

"Room? Why, yes, we *made* room. Our house was pretty big and there were plenty of extra feather beds in the attic. Mother always made the

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goose feathers up into feather beds and pillows for us girls and my brother. She counted on giving each of us four feather beds and a dozen pillows when we married, and she had a fair start even when I was a little tot. So we'd bring the feather beds down and make up beds on the spare-room floors, when the crowd was too big for the regular beds. I've seen ten girls sleeping in one big room sometimes, and they'd never settle down for the night until Mother had gone in and had a frolic with them. She was the greatest girl of them all, Mother was, and the young people thought the world of her. She was plump and comfortable looking, and, even when she was old, she had a smooth, fair skin, and pretty pink cheeks, and there were always a twinkle in her eye and a smile on her lips except when she was crying over other people's hurts.

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“Father was sour sometimes as he grew old, and his religion got to be rather grim, but Mother just laughed and loved her way straight through eighty-two years of life; and her God was like Grandmother’s God, a tender, smiling God that even wee children could cling to and love.

“How did I get from feather beds to religion? Through Mother, wasn’t it? Well, that was the way Mother’s religion worked. It had a way of mixing itself up with everything, even with feather beds and good-night frolics.

“I can see her yet, with her cap strings flying and her face all rippled over with laughter and her cheeks as pink as the prettiest girl’s, sitting on the side of a bed and talking and joking with the girls or tumbling one of them over on a feather bed, or teasing them about their beaux or telling about her own girl days down

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in Kentucky. And then I can see her dropping down on her knees before she said good-night and saying a little prayer that made God seem very near and very loving and that always left some of the gayest girls with tears in their eyes.

“Oh, Mother didn’t mind having company.

“We lived in a big red brick house beside the State road, and all the travel between Louisville and Indianapolis went that way. There wasn’t a railroad, you know, and most of the travellers rode, unless they were movers or peddlers with wagons.

“So, though we lived in the country, a good deal of the world went by us—and most of it stopped with us. Everybody knew our house and knew that Father never refused lodging and food to a traveller, and if travellers didn’t know about us someone was pretty sure to tell them.

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“‘Go on till you come to the big brick house on the hill,’ he’d say. ‘That’s Uncle Robin King’s. He’ll put you up.’”

“But what an awful imposition, Mother!” interrupted the head of the family.

His mother looked surprised, but considered the proposition fairly and passed upon it.

“Why, yes, maybe it was, Robert; but that didn’t occur to us. The inns were far apart and poor, and some folks couldn’t very well afford to put up at them, anyway. We had plenty of everything and there were Mother and Granny and my three older sisters besides the hired help, so there was no trouble about getting the work done. There wasn’t so much fussing about getting meals and washing dishes then as there is now, you know. We used what dishes we needed and no more, and we

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cooked big quantities, but it was good, plain cooking. Mother could have whipped up a whole turkey dinner for a dozen in the time Bella spends scraping out grapefruit for a salad and cutting the skins basket-shape, and stirring up that everlasting mayonnaise and putting the salad back into the skins. It's an awfully pretty looking dish when it's done, Sally, but we'd never have kept up with our company if we had fed them things like that. And we'd never have got our dishes washed if we'd had plates under all the other plates, and separate knives and forks for everything and finger-bowls and courses.

"No; we had plain meals, but they certainly were good. Everybody for hundreds of miles around knew what a famous cook Mother was. Once, just about sunset, a young man rode up to our gate on a fine, thorough-

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bred horse. We didn't know him, but he tied his horse and came up the front walk to where we were all sitting on the stoop. Laughing he was, and good looking and as thoroughbred as his horse.

"'Are you Uncle Robin King?' he asked Father.

"Father said he was, and then the boy turned to Mother.

"'Aunt Nellie,' he said. 'I'm Miranda Powell's boy and I've ridden up from Lexington to see if your Sally Lunn really is better than Mother's. She owns up that it is.'

"Mother was as pleased as Punch, and she almost fed that boy to death while he stayed with us. My sister Peggy married him later. She was almost as good a cook as Mother, but that wasn't why he fell in love with her. She had a new print dress with a pink sprig in it, that summer, and a pink calash and her eyes were

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sort of violet colour—but that wasn't what I was going to tell you about.

“No; we didn't feel imposed upon when people stopped with us. If they were friends it was just visiting, and if they were strangers it was just being Christian; and either way it was mighty entertaining.

“We used to get queer people sometimes. Once there was a foreign man with a dancing bear. I was a little bit of a girl then and I didn't sleep all night for fear the bear would get out of the old calf shed where they'd tied him, but in the morning the man let me feed honey to the bear, and I hated to have them go away.

“Runaway slaves used to come because Father was an anti-slavery man. That's why he moved from Kentucky, after freeing all his own slaves. We children never knew very much about the runaways, for they usually came in the night; but some-

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times we'd be wakened by a tapping on the back door or window, and then we'd hear Father get up and bring somebody into the house, and pretty soon Mother would be hurrying around in the kitchen and we'd smell bacon and eggs and coffee. Sister Peggy and I used to creep out of bed and watch out of our window, and by-and-by we'd see a group of dark figures go slinking off toward the woods, and things would quiet down in the house.

"I can remember once, when a lot of slaves had been escaping and the slave owners were stirring things up, Cass Dawson, the sheriff of our county, came out to our house with a posse just at dinner-time. Father was away, but Mother made them have dinner, and, when they had cleaned up their plates and were ready to go, Cass shuffled around and stood first on one foot and then on

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the other and tried to look like a sheriff, and finally he said:

“‘Now, Aunt Nellie, you’ve got to stop this business or you’ll get into trouble.’

“‘What business?’ Mother asked.

“‘This feeding and harbouring run-away niggers. It’s against the law, Aunt Nellie. The law says you can’t feed them or lodge them or sell to them or help them anyway.’

“Mother looked at him as if he were a foolish child.

“‘Well, Cass,’ she said, ‘I’ve been going by a law that says, “Feed my sheep!” God made my law. Who made yours?’

“The men grinned and Cass looked silly, but he began to bluster and say that it was a prison offence to feed runaways, and Mother listened for a little while. But at last she walked up to Cass and looked him straight in the face. Her eyes were as bright

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as stars and her face was pink all over and she just blazed out at him.

“‘Cass Dawson,’ she said, ‘I never turned away a stranger that came to me and asked for food and I’m not going to begin now. I’ve fed every mortal that ever came here and told me he was hungry, and I expect to go on doing it. I don’t care whether he’s white or black, or bond or free, and if feeding the hungry is a prison offence in Indiana, then you may as well take me to jail now as any time, for I’m going to keep right on being that kind of an offender. So you’d better get a horse ready for me and I’ll put on my bonnet.’

“I began to cry, but the sheriff backed off as if she’d pointed a pistol at him.

“‘Take you to jail, Aunt Nellie?’ he stammered. ‘Why, the whole country’d turn out and lynch me!’

“‘Well, then, if you aren’t going

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to do your duty, for pity's sake run along and let me get at mine,' said Mother.

"And that was the last we ever heard about her feeding runaways, though our house used to be watched sometimes.

"Did I ever tell you how I got my name from one of the strangers Father took in? A real, nice, pleasant-spoken man he was, they say. He came along one spring with a boy and a covered wagon full of waxworks, and he had to stay at our house three days, because one of his horses was dead lame.

"Father wouldn't take any pay. He never did—and so, the evening before they went away, the man and the boy unpacked all the wax figures and brought them into the sitting room and showed them off.

"Father was troubled for fear it bordered on theatricals, but the man

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said it was educational and high class and elegant, and Mother told Father it wasn't right to throw the man's gratitude back in his face. She was just as crazy to see the show as the children were, I reckon.

"So the man set the figures up, one at a time, and told all about them. There were George Washington and Shakespeare and Queen Elizabeth and Napoleon and Marie Louise and lots of others—only he didn't get out the murderers and pirates, and the boy told brother Joe afterward that they were the best part of the show.

"Mother and the girls liked Marie Louise best of any of the waxworks. They always told me she was as pretty as could be and had on a blue velvet dress with gold lace on it, and lots of jewels and her hair all up in puffs.

"I was only three weeks old, and they hadn't really settled on a name for me, and when the showman saw

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how Mother and the girls took on over Marie Louise, he said:

“Why don’t you name that fine baby for her?”

“Father was shocked at first. He’d always named his children out of the Bible, and it seemed sort of heathen to name one for a wax figure; but everybody else thought it was a beautiful plan, and finally he gave in and so that’s what I was named—Marie Louise Bonaparte King—but everybody called me Louise. I’ve always been glad the waxworks man got there when he did, because Father had half decided to call me Deborah, and that’s an ugly name, even if she was in the Bible.”

“I’m glad, too, Granny,” said little Louise contentedly. “Tell about some more company.”

The Little Old Lady laughed.

“Oh, we had all sorts. One stormy night an eloping couple came. They’d

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run away from Lexington, Kentucky, and they weren't much more than children. I can remember exactly how the girl looked when she came in out of the storm with her curly hair all wet from the rain and her pretty face white and scared and tired. They had been married on the way, but her folks had sworn they'd shoot the boy if he didn't keep away from her, and she was afraid her brothers were after them. Father quoted the Bible about honouring your father and mother, and was going to pray with them but Mother said what they needed was dry clothes.

"So she whisked them off to get dry and have some supper, and when she found they were married, and that there was no use arguing about obeying parents, she just opened her arms and her heart to them, along with her home, and cuddled and petted and heartened them until they were as

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jolly and happy as a bride and bridegroom should be. They stayed a week, and Mother wrote to the girl's father. So did the girl; and one day a fine-looking, peppery old man rode up on a big black horse, and the next thing we knew the little bride was hugging him and crying on his shoulder and he was saying that he had come to take the young fools home.

"He stayed a while though. Folks generally did stay a while at our house—especially ministers. My land, but we did fairly swarm with ministers! circuit riders, you know, and substitutes. Seems to me we were always frying chickens for ministers, and most of the regular ones fell in love with me. It was funny about that. I was young and foolish and not nearly so religious as the rest of the family, but some way or other I always played hob with ministers, and Father was set on my marrying

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one of them. He thought it would be a wonderful blessing to have a minister right in the family, but I didn't feel that way about it; they weren't my idea of interesting company.

"When I was a child I used to sit out on the front stoop and look down the road for hours at a time, wishing some real company would come through the covered bridge and up the hill to stay with us, somebody exciting; and I'd pretend people *were* coming—kings and queens and knights and soldiers and Christian and Faithful and missionaries from China and robbers and lovers. We didn't have story books. Father didn't approve of them, but I'd picked up notions out of histories and 'Pilgrim's Progress' and the church papers, and I put the lovers in after George Powell rode up from Kentucky to sample Mother's Sally Lunn and lost his heart to Sister Peggy. I was tremendously

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stirred up about George and Peggy, and I made up my mind that some day my own lover would come riding up the hill. I was 'most afraid to go to bed nights for fear I'd miss seeing him come, but I wouldn't have dared telling anybody about watching for him—not even Mother."

"Did he come, Granny?" asked little Louise, eagerly.

The old face softened, flushed, took on a shining glory that was a reflection from a sunlit youth.

"Yes, he came."

The Little Old Lady's voice was low and very sweet. And then she fell to dreaming for a while, and her son and his wife looked into each other's faces and went back through the years to find a dream of their own, and the little granddaughter sat looking into the future with serious, questioning eyes.

CHAPTER V

She Tells Her Own Exquisite Love Story

THE Little Old Lady's thin, white hands fluttered daintily among the piles of cobwebby lingerie—folding, smoothing, patting, tying a ribbon bow, picking out a bit of lace—but the Little Old Lady's face wore its far-away look.

“You're thinking long-ago thoughts, Granny.” The small granddaughter's voice held a hopeful note. “Long-ago thoughts” so often meant a story, and Granny's namesake loved to walk with her along the ways of memory.

The Little Old Lady smiled confession.

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"Yes, dear. I had gone back. It seems such a little time ago that I was falling in love and dreaming and hoping and marrying; and now my eldest granddaughter is living the story in her turn, and some day her granddaughter will follow the same road. I like to think of life and love going on and on together, even though each separate story does have an end in this life."

That thought was too big for twelve-year-old Louise, but she waited patiently for the story that was in the air. One had to let Granny travel back to the long ago in her own way. The mother of Louise and of the morrow's bride looked up from the trunk-tray, into which she was tucking billows of shimmering pink satin and lace, and smiled mistily at the mother-in-law for whom the "in-law" had never been used.

"It's wonderful," she said, "but it's very hard on mothers."

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She fell to packing again; but she was careful to brush away the tears that might have spotted the pink ball gown. The Little Old Lady smiled at her with wise, tender eyes.

"It's what we bear them for," she said, quietly; "and Ruth's marrying a splendid lad, and they will live right here in New York—but I know it's hard, Sally."

And then, out of her loving wisdom, she passed from sympathy to laughter.

"Getting married is such an undertaking nowadays that it's hard on everybody," she said, lightly. "What with announcing an engagement and having engagement parties, and getting a trousseau, and worrying through prenuptial social affairs, and planning bridesmaids' dresses, wedding refreshments and music, and all that sort of flummadiddle, there isn't rest for any one. I wonder a girl ever lives to get

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married. Now there's that rehearsal this afternoon! Rehearsing a wedding as if it were a play! I can't help laughing about it, and yet it makes me sort of provoked, too. Ruth's fairly worn out, but there she is, putting in the whole afternoon before her wedding day drilling bridesmaids and ushers and organist and Father, and husband that is to be. Seems to me there's no time for her to have any thoughts or feelings about the real meaning of marriage. I don't believe she and Jim will have any even when the ceremony is going on. They'll be so worried about keeping step to the music and getting to a certain spot at a certain time and having the white velvet kneeling cushions in the right place that they won't know whether they are promising to love and cherish or to have beets for dinner."

She was merry now, and her daughter-in-law was smiling.

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"Didn't you have any 'flumma-diddle' about your wedding, Mother?" she asked.

"My wedding? Gracious, no! It was as much as the bargain that we had the wedding." The Little Old Lady's face was all aglow with memories.

"Tell it, Granny," begged Louise from her story-hour place beside her grandmother's knee.

"Well, you see, at my wedding—" began the Little Old Lady.

"Oh, no! from the very beginning. You promised, you know, that you'd tell us how he rode up the hill."

"Did I?" The glow on Granny's face flushed to pink. The smile on her lips was very sweet. "Then I'll have to go back a long way, for I was only ten when he rode up the hill; and I was sitting on the front steps, with my elbows on my fat little knees and my chin in my hands and was

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feeling dreadfully abused. Both of my big sisters had gone to Harriet Converse's wedding at Powell. A big wedding it was, as weddings went down there. Harriet was marrying a Northern man she had met when she was visiting in Louisville and was making quite a to-do about it. Our girls were bridesmaids and I had been invited to the wedding, but Father had said that I was too young to go. So there I was, the morning after the wedding, sitting on the stoop and wishing something would happen.

"I remember I had on one of my blue-and-white-checked linen dresses. Mother wove the linen for them and I always wore them. People would think they were finenow—hand-woven and vegetable dye, you know, but calicoes were just coming into fashion then; sixty cents a yard they were—and, my! how I did want a pink-sprigged calico! My pantalettes

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were the only things I could be really proud of. Sister Peggy made them and she was a wonderful needle-woman, so she always put plenty of frills and embroidery and tucks on them. I had on my favourite pair that morning; but they didn't chirk me up a bit and I was getting glummer and glummer, when, all of a sudden, something did happen.

"There was a clatter of hoofs in the covered bridge at the bottom of the hill; and, in a minute, a crowd of girls and men on horseback came out into the sunlight. The whole wedding party it was, bride and bridegroom and all. I jumped up and squealed for joy, and Mother came running from the house, and we hurried down to the gate just as the twenty riders came cantering up, the girls in their gay finery, with dark riding skirts slipped on over their dresses and the men in their best, and the horses—

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well, we rode good horses down there across the river from Kentucky. I can see it all now, and it was a brave sight. No one ever saw anything on the bridle path in Central Park to equal it.

“The bride was off her horse first and into Mother’s arms, and when she had been hugged and kissed she introduced her husband; then she said: ‘This is my new brother, Robert Dale, Aunt Nellie.’

“I knew right then and there that he was the most wonderful man in the world, and I never changed my mind about it. He was handsome; but that wasn’t it, for his brother was handsomer; but there was something in Robert’s face, something honest and tender and sweet and strong; yes, and merry, too. He had a smile that made sunshine all around him, and when he spoke to Mother his voice matched his smile. It was low and

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clear and there was a little laugh crinkling through it.

"Harriet had grabbed me and kissed me, and when she said, 'Robert, this is Louise,' I curtsied, but I didn't have the courage to look at him; so I studied the tips of my shoes and was desperately glad that I had on my scalloped pantalettes.

"The crowd had come over to our house for the 'infaire' dinner. That's the bridegroom's dinner on the day after the wedding, you know; but Mr. Dale was far away from his home and so there hadn't been any plan for an 'infaire' until, as the Powell party was riding part way home with my sisters and brother, they met Father going the other way to mill.

"'Why don't you go over to the house for your "infaire" dinner?' he asked. 'It'd please Nellie and I'll be back in an hour or two.'

"They took him at his word and

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came, twenty of them, mind you. And it did please Nellie, and there wasn't any sending out to a delicatessen store, either. All of the girls, including the bride, tied on big aprons and helped Mother with the dinner; and the young men went scurrying around, waiting on the girls, running down to the springhouse with them, or to the orchard or to the storehouse; and I tagged around after them, getting in everybody's way and having a beautiful time.

“When Father came home he took the greatest kind of a fancy to my Mr. Dale, and he talked to him most of the afternoon in spite of all the girls could do to get the young man away. Father was always that way. He liked people or he didn't, and he was quick about making up his mind which it was to be; so he made Robert a proposition that very day; and, when the crowd was getting ready to

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leave late in the afternoon, he said in a casual sort of way:

“‘Robert isn’t going North tomorrow. He’s agreed to stay down here and take the school for the winter and make his home with us.’

“Glad? Why, I turned and ran away to the kitchen for fear my heart would burst right before everybody. I loved school, but we had never had a good teacher, and the idea of studying with Robert Dale and having him living in our house was so wonderful that I was fairly mazed with it.

“By-and-by somebody came in at the kitchen door, and, when I looked up, there was my new teacher.

“‘Aren’t you going to tell me that you’re glad?’ he asked; and when I stammered something about being very glad, he took my two hands and looked down at me with that kind, shining look of his in his eyes, and said: ‘Well, Little Girl, it was the idea

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of training the mind back of those brown eyes of yours that made me agree to stay; so, you see, we *have* to be friends.'

"He went away, then; but he left my world all flooded with rose colour, and the rose colour never died out until the day when he went away again—to a far country."

A vision of that far country glorified the sweet old face, and the listening woman understood and was silent; but the listening child was busy with child thoughts and had not even noticed that a shadow had crept into the story.

"Did you really love school, Granny?" she asked incredulously; and the Little Old Lady came back to the world from which the rose colour had faded, though sunshine lingered in it still.

"Why, surely, Child! We didn't have to have our education pepto-

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nized and rammed down our throats when I was a child, as you youngsters do now. We were only too glad to get it at all, and after the new Northern teacher came school was like Heaven. It took us some time to get used to him, of course, because he was so different from the teachers we had had before, and he had what seemed to us awfully queer ideas, like not allowing us to study our spelling lessons out loud. The big boys thought that they could bully him, because he was slim and low-voiced and scholarly looking, but they got over that notion mighty quick, and he ruled us as nobody had ever ruled us before, yet all the pupils adored him.

“It must have seemed queer to him—the life and the teaching and everything—but the doctor had told him he must get out of his office for a year or two, and the wholesomeness and peace of our life down there in the

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country had appealed to him and he seemed contented. He worshipped Mother from the start, and Father and he were great friends, though they didn't agree on everything; and the girls and Joe were like sisters and brother to him, but I was his favourite. Everybody realized that and realized, too, that I thought everything of him; but I was only a child, so nobody imagined that we would ever fall in love with each other. The idea never occurred to me.

"Sakes alive, how I did study that winter! And how patiently he did help me in the evenings, when lessons were too hard! He had one of the downstairs bedrooms fixed up as a study, with a little bedroom off from it, and, when I had stuck fast in a problem, I'd go along the hall and tap at his door. I never got used to hearing him say 'Come.' It always seemed like a beautiful surprise; but

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I would go in and usually I'd find him sitting by the table with a book open before him and his head on his hand—a slender white hand it was, and he wore his hair a little bit long so that it fell over his fingers. When the door opened he'd look up, and a welcome would come into his eyes, dark blue eyes they were and they could be very serious and stern, but, for me——”

The Little Old Lady's voice faltered and broke, and she smoothed a white petticoat more than was actually necessary as she met that look from eyes that had been closed so long; but when she went on her voice was cheerful and steady again:

“He stayed with us during the summer that followed that winter, and taught the school a second winter; but when the second summer came he went back to his home in Canada. My heart was broken over his going

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and I didn't care who knew it. One doesn't have to hide heart-breaks at twelve. That's one of the blindest things about childhood.

"Mr. Dale was terribly sorry for me. I never thought of calling him 'Robert' then, though all the rest of the family did. Father wouldn't have thought I was being properly respectful to my teacher, and it wasn't the fashion then for children to be disrespectful to their elders. Yes, he was mighty sorry for me; and he petted me and consoled me and promised to write to me and to come back and see me; but I just burrowed my head into his shoulder and refused to be comforted. His going away was the end of my new heaven and new earth.

"After he left I missed him so much that I was downright ailing for a while, and Mother gave me boneset tea and made me take sassafras

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for my blood; but after a few weeks I cheered up, and then I began getting letters from him. That helped a lot. Letters from anybody were an event in those days, and getting a letter from him was the most exciting thing I could imagine. They were dear letters, too—nice, elder brotherly letters that all the family could read.

“I was fifteen when he came back for a summer visit and I was quite a slip of a girl, but I still wore curls and short frocks.”

“Were you pretty, Granny?” asked Louise.

The Little Old Lady blushed and settled her cap.

“Well, they did say—but boys are silly creatures and I didn’t care what they said or thought. I was always measuring them by Mr. Dale and they didn’t size up very well.

“Things were just as they always had been between him and me, yet

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there was a difference, too. I was still openly his pet and favourite and he still treated me as a nice child and flirted around with the older girls; but sometimes I found him looking at me in a surprised sort of way, and he wouldn't let me fetch and carry for him as I had three years before, and he was always on hand to do things for me when I needed any one.

"Did I tell you that he played the flute? Nobody seems to play the flute now; and I'm sure I can't see why, for there's nothing else so sweet—to my mind. Robert played beautifully; and in the evenings, while he was visiting us that summer, he and I used to sit out under the big weeping-willow tree in the side yard and he'd teach me new songs. I had a real sweet little voice and I could pick up a tune quicker than most people, and it wasn't

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any trouble at all for me to remember the words; so he taught me dozens of songs that were fashionable out in the world, though we hadn't heard them down there—'Araby's Daughter,' 'Gayly the Troubadour' and 'Flow Gently, Sweet Afton,' and nice, sentimental things like that. The things girls sing now haven't any sentiment, and most of them haven't any real tune, and if they do have a tune it's usually a crazy one. You can't imagine any one sitting out under a weeping-willow tree, on a summer evening, and playing any of Ruth's songs on a flute, now, can you? But then, I don't believe lovers ever do have such peaceful, happy, heartachey-times together nowadays as we had that summer. Sometimes I sit and hum the old songs, when I'm alone in the twilight, and I can almost hear the sound of Robert's flute and see his face in the dusk.

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“Camp meeting was going on when he went away again. The grounds were in a beach grove on the corner of Father’s farm, and we went to all of the evening meetings—everybody did. The last night of Robert’s visit he went over to the grounds early with us, so that he could have a chance to say good-bye to every one, for he was going to ride over to Madison that night and take the boat from there.

“Dearie me, but I was miserable! I crept off into a dark corner and sat there while he went around shaking hands and talking and joking; and I can see how the big fires on raised platforms threw yellow lights among the trees, and I can hear how the brook that ran along by the camp-meeting grounds gurgled and splashed and tumbled over the rocks, and I can remember just how my heart came up into my throat when Robert stood

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still and looked all around, searching for something, and then started toward my corner. I didn't say a word when he came—only looked at him and tried to choke the sobs back. He put his hands under my arms and lifted me up on one of the low benches. My face was on a level with his, standing so; and he looked into it a long time without speaking. Then he said:

“‘Little Girl, I'm coming back for you one of these days. Will you wait for me?’

“I couldn't say a word, but I reckon my face was answer enough; so he kissed me and went over to where his horse was tied under a shed and a moment later I saw him riding off into the shadow.”

“Oh, Granny, how hurtful!” sighed the small girl at the Little Old Lady's knee.

Granny nodded.

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“Yes; it *was* hurtful. But letters began to come again. They came oftener than before and they were longer and different; but I could still let Father and Mother read them. Girls would laugh at them now, I reckon, and call them stilted and old-fashioned because they were full of lofty sentiments and poetical quotations and things like that; but I thought they were beautiful. I’ve read them until they are worn in holes and the ink has almost faded away, but I still think they are the most beautiful letters that ever were written, and it wouldn’t hurt the young men who are writing love letters now to polish up their style a little. It’s scandalous that college-educated boys can’t even write a note anybody can read, or that’s worth reading if one could read it. But then lovers send night telegrams now instead of letters. They don’t

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have time for thirty-five-page letters, like Robert's. I'm glad I lived my love story in the old days.

"The letters came for two years. Then Robert came himself, and from the very first day everything was different between us, though he treated me much as he always had and nobody seemed to notice any difference. I was still a child to my family, you see. They didn't realize that I had been growing up, though Father had set his heart on my marrying Philip Beeker, whose father's farm joined ours, when the time should come for me to think of marrying.

"One evening we were riding home from church, a whole crowd of young folks, and, when we came to a place where the road wound through the woods, Robert put his hand on my horse's bridle and held him back until the rest of the crowd had gone on out of sight. And then he—well,

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I'm not going to tell you what he said. There are some things one can't tell even after seventy years, but I remember every word, and I remember how the wind rustled in the trees, and how the night creatures chirped and chattered and whirred, and how the wet ferns and weeds around a spring beside the road smelled, and how Robert's face looked in the moonlight, and how for the first time in my life I felt as though I might fall off of a horse. I didn't fall. Robert saw to that; and, before we galloped on to overtake the others, I had told him that I would marry him before he went North again, if Father would consent.

"When we got home he went to Father.

"Oh, my dears, what a storm there was! The house fairly rocked with it. Father said I was a mere child, and that any man was a fool to im-

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agine he would allow me to marry and go off to the ends of the earth when I'd never been away from home overnight, and that he wouldn't allow me to go so far away with a stranger, even when I got old enough to talk about marrying. He said harder things, too. Father had a regular Old Testament temper and vocabulary when he really got going and he didn't mince words.

"I cried, and Mother looked unhappy, and Bess was angry with Father, and Joe went around frowning, and altogether home wasn't a cheerful place; but Robert was as calm as a May morning. He said he didn't wonder that Father felt as he did, but that we were going to be married just the same and that I mustn't worry; and he stayed on as if nothing had happened. Father looked kind of shamefaced after a day or two, and he got me a new dress I'd been teasing

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for, but nothing more was said about my marrying and I couldn't help worrying. I got pale and thin that summer, and Mother told me afterward that Father was anxious about me and insisted upon her giving me all sorts of herb teas; but he wouldn't give in, and the idea of disobeying him never entered my head.

"Poor Mother had a hard time. She thought I was too young to marry and she couldn't bear to think of my going off to Canada. It seemed ten times as far in those days before railroads as it would now, you know. But she loved me dearly and she loved Robert, and it wasn't in her to hurt any one.

"Robert gave me a ring one day. It had been his mother's and it was a very beautiful one, but I told him Father would never let me wear it. He told me to keep it on and see what happened. So I wore it at the supper

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table, and that evening, as I was passing through the hall, I heard Mother say to Father: 'Robin, Robert has given Louise a ring, and my advice to you is that you never see it.'

"That was all. Father never did see the ring. Mother was all for the New Testament, but she was very impressive when she asserted herself.

"Robert was going to stay in Madison with relatives for two weeks before going home, and, as the first of September came near and Father didn't show any signs of relenting, I gave up hope and was frightfully blue and unhappy, but Robert said he knew Father and that the old gentleman would come around at the eleventh hour. The night before he went to Madison he asked me to go to Father with him and make a last stand, and I did it, though I would rather have faced a loaded cannon. But there was only another scene.

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I had always been afraid of Father, but I took my courage in both hands that night and told him I would never marry without his consent, but that I would never marry any one except Robert, and would be utterly miserable every minute after he left me.

“Father only grunted; so Robert and I went out of the room and said good-bye.

“I certainly did grieve when he had gone. My face looked so white and big-eyed in the looking-glass that I hardly knew it, and I couldn’t eat, and I went around as though I were walking in my sleep. Mother was sad and Father was gloomy and everything was horrid and changed in the home.

“Then, one evening at the end of ten days, the door opened and Robert walked in. It seems he had intended to do it all the time, but he wanted

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to let Father see just how things were going to be, if he did go away to Canada without me, and so he hadn't even dared to tell me. I don't know who was gladdest to see him. Father looked as though he had been relieved from the gallows, and Mother beamed and Bess jumped up and kissed Robert three times and Joe almost wrung his hand off; but I just put my hand up to my throat and never said a word. It's funny how your throat hurts when your heart's overfull.

"Robert wasn't a bit embarrassed but after my brother and sister had slipped out of the room he said that he had found he couldn't go away without seeing me again, and that he had felt sure Father couldn't grudge us a few hours more together when all the rest of our lives were to be sacrificed to his command. With that I began to cry, and Mother sprang to her feet

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and threw her cap strings back, as she always did when she was excited and faced Father.

“‘Robin,’ she said, ‘this will never do! There’s no arguing against true love, and I’d rather never see Louise again and know she was happy than have her with me all my life and know *her* life was spoiled. We’ll have no more foolishness about it. Tell Robert he can have the child and your blessing with her.’

“Father opened and shut his mouth once or twice and tried to look fierce and stubborn, but Mother tapped him on the shoulder and he gave in. ‘I’ve nothing against you, Robert,’ he said. ‘You may take her; but she’s o’er young and foolish. You’ll have to remember that she’s only a child.’

“‘Don’t you fear, sir,’ said Robert. ‘She’s a woman child—and we’ll be married to-morrow!’

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“‘Mercy be, Lad!’ said Mother. ‘She can’t be ready.’

“‘Well, then, Monday,’ said Robert. ‘That will give you four days, and we must go on Tuesday’s boat. I can get her any finery she wants in Cincinnati.’

“And so I had just four days to make ready for *my* wedding. I had never had many clothes because Father had thought I was too young for furbelows; but Bess’s things almost fitted me and she was all ready for a visit in Lexington. She was angel good to me. I’ll never forget it. I had her changeable silk—brown and blue, with rows and rows of corded shirring for trimming, and miles of silk in the skirt—for a dress-up gown; and I was married in her new white muslin, made with short puff sleeves and round neck; and her blue poplin was a nice travelling dress for me, and her underclothes added to mine made a very respectable show-

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ing—good, serviceable, hand-woven linen underclothes, too, not much like this foolish, flimsy stuff of Ruth's.

“Father always gave each child who married ten cattle and ten sheep and ten pigs and a horse and a saddle, but we couldn't take all those with us and wouldn't have had any place for them, anyway, because we were going to live in a town, so Father gave me money instead; but he felt so dreadfully about my not having my own horse and saddle that Robert finally made arrangements to have them sent up to us. Mother packed my feather beds and pillows, and house linen, and I put my few treasures in my brand-new, little horsehair trunk, and on Monday afternoon the old minister, who had ridden that circuit ever since I was born, married me to Robert in our parlour, with nobody except the family looking on.

“Bess and Joe and Father cried

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when I left, but Mother didn't. Not Mother! Her cheeks were very red and her eyes were very bright when she went down the path to the gate with us; but she smiled when she kissed me good-bye and when she put her hands on Robert's shoulders and said: 'God bless you, Son. Be good to her.'

"There never was any one like Mother."

The Little Old Lady's voice trailed off into silence, and for a while there was no sound save the ticking of the clock that was marking off the hours before another wedding day.

"Well, it wasn't much like Ruth's story," said little Louise, after a thinking time unusually long for her, "but I sort of love it, Granny."

Granny smiled.

"It's a very old-fashioned love story, dear; but Ruth can't have a happier honeymoon at Palm Beach than I had at Niagara."

CHAPTER VI

The Big Christmas Present That Came Into Her Home

CHRISTMAS EVE had come and was almost gone. There was no chance for more eleventh-hour shopping. The Christmas letters and cards had been posted. The packages that had not already gone by express or messenger were all wrapped and tied in festive fashion and piled neatly in various rooms of the apartment.

Mrs. Robert Dale dropped into a big armchair and sighed eloquently.

"I'm an absolute wreck," she admitted, "but I think everything is done. I do wish I had sent Milly.

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the tray instead of the muffineer. She's almost sure to send me something much more expensive than the muffineer. And, now that it's too late to get anything, I feel positive that Clara Bates will send me a present to-morrow. There's no earthly reason why she should, but I feel it coming on, and I never even thought of her when I was making out my list. Maybe there will be something among my presents in the morning—from someone I don't care about, you know—that I can send around to her just by way of making sure."

"Did you get your furs to-day?" asked the head of the family from his place on the couch.

"Robert, I couldn't—I simply couldn't! I was so tired I could hardly wriggle, and there were a million last things, more or less, that I had to do, and I had positively promised to be at the candy table

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of the Hospital Bazaar from two to four. But I have the check, dear. That's just the same, and I can choose my furs after Christmas when the stores won't be so crowded and I won't be so mortally tired and things will be marked down."

"That's not my idea of a Christmas present," grumbled the husband. "I'd rather have something in my pocket that you didn't know anything about and surprise you with it Christmas morning."

A look of consternation swept over Mrs. Dale's tired face.

"For goodness' sake, Bob, don't ever take to surprising me with Christmas presents! We can't afford it. I need too many things to let you spend a lot of money on something I probably wouldn't need and might not even like. I'd much rather have a check."

A muffled protest sounded from

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the couch—something about that sort of Christmas giving being no more fun than paying the butcher's bill.

It brought the nerve-worn woman in the big chair to the verge of tears.

"Well, you are always wishing I were more economical and practical, and when I do try to be practical you say I haven't any sentiment; and I'm sure nobody works harder over Christmas than I do!"

The tears were very near the surface now.

"Christmas is frightfully expensive, anyway. Everybody expects so much of one and most of our friends and relatives have more money than we have, and even little things do mount up."

"There, there!" The husband's tone was of the "Heaven give me strength" variety, usually adopted by the man who is being patient with

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a nervous and unreasonable wife. "I didn't say you were extravagant or that you hadn't any sentiment. I was only wishing we all had a little more real sentiment about this Christmas business and went in less for flubdub. The fault isn't yours, Sally. We all work ourselves to fiddle strings and spend more than we can afford, and only succeed in spoiling Christmas. I'll bet things were different down at Grandfather's. Weren't they, Mother?"

The Little Old Lady smiled.

"Very different, dear, and better I think. But then, I know I'm foolish about the old times down there. Everything about them seems better to me—except children and grandchildren. No generation ever did show children and grandchildren to beat mine."

She laughed lightly at her own prejudice, and the tension in the room

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lessened. Tension never lasted long in the same room with the Little Old Lady.

"There's one thing sure, Sally," she went on, her eyes turned lovingly toward the daughter-in-law who had worn herself out in the cause of the modern Christmas. "No one in the old days could have worked harder to do her duty than you have this last month. I don't wonder you are tired. It's a mercy you aren't sick in bed—and if what you've done hasn't been for the best happiness of every one concerned that isn't your fault. You've done your duty as you saw it, and I do think you've accomplished wonders."

The daughter-in-law's face lightened. Appreciation is a wonderful emollient for ragged nerves.

"Weren't people dead tired on Christmas Eve when you were young, Mother?" she asked.

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The Little Old Lady's brain and heart were straightway so busy with memories of a great old farmhouse living-room, where candlelight and the flames of huge firelogs shone on happy faces and fought with flickering shadows, that she quite forgot to answer the question; and it was only when Louise, the small granddaughter, spoke that she came back, with a start, to the electric-lighted, steam-heated room perched high above the city streets.

"Didn't you have any Christmas presents, Granny?"

The Little Old Lady answered both questions together.

"Why, yes, we did have Christmas presents, but such very simple ones that there wasn't much stress or strain about getting them ready, and we very seldom exchanged presents with any one outside our own family, so no one's list could be long. It was

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rather an exceptional thing for the grown-ups to give each other presents at all, and even among us children presents weren't the whole meaning of Christmas, as they seem to be now. Jollity and good will and general merrymaking were the things that made Christmas, and then, back of it all, was the real reason for peace on earth and good will toward men. I don't believe we lost sight of that as completely as most folks do now. Maybe we children would have slurred over the religious side of the festival if we had been allowed to do it, but we weren't likely to have the chance—not in Father's home, and most of the homes in our neighbourhood were like his in that respect.

“Everybody wasn't so sternly religious as Father, but religion was a part of every-day living then. It's a sort of Sunday affair now, where it hasn't dropped out of sight altogether;

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at least orthodox religion is. I shouldn't wonder if there were a mighty lot of good Gospel religion going on nowadays without calling itself religion at all. I try to think about that when I see how people I know have fallen away from the old religious ways. I reckon it's what you live, not what you believe or say, that counts as grace, but it certainly does seem to me as if the Christ Child's birth had been pretty well lost sight of in Christmas celebrating. Christmas might as well be Saint Valentine's Day or May Day or any other holiday, except that everybody is more extravagant and more tired at Christmastime."

"Did you go to church all day Christmas, Granny?" The small girl's eyes were wide with pity, and Granny laughed as she met the look.

"No, indeed—only for an hour in the morning, and then of course we

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had family prayers in the morning and the evening; but the Christmas meaning was in the air. Sometimes I'd stop to think why I was so happy, and I'd decide it was partly my new mittens and partly because Christ was born. I wasn't very serious-minded, just a normal, grubby, healthy little girl; but I didn't forget about Christ being born, you see, even if I did mix it up with new mittens; and I've an idea that's a pretty good way to live—just taking your religion and your mittens along together."

"Did you always get mittens, Granny?"

"Mercy, yes! Christmas wouldn't have been Christmas without new mittens—and wristlets—and comforters—and hoods. Grandmother used to knit them for us. She always did the knitting for the family, but for a month or so before Christmas she

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would be very mysterious about what she was doing—cover up her knitting if any of us children came in, and sometimes go to her own room to knit instead of sitting in her own particular corner by the fireplace. Christmas things were always in special fancy stitches and unusual colours. Grandmother would send to Louisville for the yarns sometimes instead of spinning and dyeing them, and we were as excited over those mittens and wristlets as you'd be over getting a pony or a piano.

“Mother would usually make something for us, too, and then she would persuade Father into buying us little things that weren't too serious. His taste rather ran to new slates and very useful presents like that, but Mother understood children better. We had stick candy on Christmas and thought it was wonderful, though it wasn't half so good as the maple sugar and

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nut candy we made ourselves; and each of us had an orange. That was a very special treat, and long before Christmas we'd usually bargain off our Christmas oranges. Joe almost always got mine. I never *was* very forehanded, and when I wanted something from him I'd promise him my Christmas orange for it. That was all right when Christmas was a long way off, but when Christmas morning came and I had to take my orange out of the toe of my stocking and hand it over—dear me, what a trial it was! I will say for Joe, though, that he usually gave me part of it.

“He got a jew's-harp every Christmas. That was the thing he wanted most and the old jew's-harp was always used up before the new one was due, so nobody had to do any worrying over what to get for him.”

“But didn't you ever get any *big* presents?” Mittens and jew's-harps

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and oranges were not Louise's idea of Christmas riches. Granny's eyes twinkled.

"You never got a present in your pampered little life, dearie, that looked as big to you as an orange looked to me or as a jew's-harp looked to Joe; yet, mind you, we weren't poor folk. Father was worth more money than your father is to-day and we lived well, as living went in those days. Ideas of necessities and luxuries were different, that's all, and I'm thinking that's why there wasn't any groaning about the high cost of living.

"We did have a big present one year, though—the biggest kind of a present."

The child of a more extravagant day looked tremendously relieved. It had been terrible to think that the Christmas joys of so dear a grandmother had been bounded on the

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north by new mittens and on the south by an orange.

“What was it, Granny?” The voice and eyes were eager.

“Well”—the Little Old Lady smoothed the black silk over her knees and her story-telling look came into her face—“it happened on Christmas Eve. Father had ridden over to the village to get something Mother wanted, but Grandmother and Mother and my two sisters and Brother Joe and Lizzie, the hired help, and I were at home in the big living-room and having a beautiful time. We children had trimmed the room with green boughs and berries and there were dozens of extra candles lighted and the Yule log in the fireplace was so big that two men had hardly been able to walk it in. We always did have backlogs too big to be carried, you know, and when one was needed the men laid a wide board

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down on the floor from the door to the fireplace and walked the log along it. Nobody ever sees such a fire now as was roaring up our chimney that night.

“There were dishes of apples and nuts on the table—beech nuts and chestnuts and butternuts and walnuts. Bushels and bushels of them were always stored in the attic each autumn.

“The girls had made a pan of butternut maple taffy, and Mother had set out a plate of fresh crullers and cookies, and a pitcher of sweet cider was waiting for Father. Joe and I were popping corn—not in a popper. I don’t believe poppers had been invented then and we popped our corn in one of the sheet-iron baking-ovens that Mother used for cooking in the big fireplace. There wasn’t a stove in the house until years later. We’d put the corn in the oven and shut it up tight and set it on the coals, and pretty

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soon there'd be a tremendous clatter, and when the noise stopped we knew the corn was all popped.

"I remember the corn was banging against the sides of the oven that night, when we heard a horse gallop along the road and stop in front of the house and we knew Father had come. Then a few moments later he came along the porch, stamping the snow off his boots, and opened the door.

"I can see him as plainly as I did then—so tall and broad-shouldered that he fairly filled the doorway, his wide-brimmed hat and his bright blue, brass-buttoned cape coat all powdered with snow, and his face shining with love as he looked in at us. Even Father sloughed off all his sternness at Christmastime.

"He came in, shaking himself and laughing, and stood with his broad back to the fire, rubbing his chilled fingers. Dearie me, how it all comes back."

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The Little Old Lady wandered off into dreams, but her granddaughter called her back.

“But the Christmas present, Granny?”

“Oh, yes; the Christmas present! I mustn’t forget that. Well, Father stood there smiling at each of us in turn until he came to Mother. He had a very special sort of a smile for Mother always, and this Christmas Eve it was even more special than usual. He was happy and at peace in his home, with his wife and his children and his mother gathered around the hearth, and he was a man to realize his blessings and be thankful for them.

“But all of a sudden a little shadow crossed his face. ‘Nellie,’ he said, ‘I came mighty near bringing you a Christmas gift.’

“Mother laughed. ‘Near isn’t near enough, Robin,’ she said. ‘Why didn’t you bring it?’

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“‘I was afraid you wouldn’t like it.’ Father’s voice was serious. We all looked up at him in surprise, and Mother got up out of her chair and walked over to him.

“‘What was it, Robin?’ she asked in a puzzled way.

“‘Another child, Nellie—such a pitiful little shaver! When I went into the store he was there, sitting on a soapbox in a corner—the thinnest, raggedest, dirtiest little scrap of a fellow, with big, miserable eyes in a white face. Belden, from down Morris way, had brought him—taking him up to the poorhouse at Madison, but his horse went lame to-day and he had to lay up.

“‘Mad as a hornet Belden was—said he had calculated to spend Christmas with his sister in Madison, but now he couldn’t get there before afternoon. He was going to spend the night with Si, and the boy was to

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sleep alone in the back of the store. Seems he'd been living with his mother in a little woodsman's cabin since his father ran away and left them last year. They'd have been looked after if they had lived around here, but the Morris folks didn't rightly know how poor they were and the mother was poison proud and wouldn't ask for help. So they starved along until she got pneumonia and died Saturday.

"The boy went for someone then, but it was too late to do anything except bury the poor woman and make some provision for the boy. Nobody around there wanted to take him in, so the poorhouse seemed to be the only thing, but it sort of broke me all up—Christmas time, you know, and his mother just dead, and such a little chap!"

"Mother's face was all a-quiver and her eyes were full of tears. 'Robin King,' she said, taking hold of Father's

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coat lapels and giving him a little shake. 'Go get that boy for me. Go get him at once. I'm ashamed of you!'

"'But you have so much to do now, Nellie,' Father said, putting his big hands over hers.

"'A woman can't have too much mothering to do. Go quick, Robin. Missing his mother! And on his way to the poorhouse! And sleeping alone in the store! And Christmas Eve! Hurry, Robin, hurry!'

"She fairly pushed him out of the door, but he stooped to kiss her before he went and he held her close for a minute.

"They understood each other, those two.

"You can imagine how excited we all were. I reckon I danced from one foot to the other for the whole hour that Father was gone, but at last we heard hoofs coming fast through the

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night—clippity clap, clippity clap!—and then Father came stamping along the porch and opened the door and stood in the doorway again, but this time he unwrapped his big blue coat from around a little boy and set him down on the floor. All eyes, the child seemed—and oh, such miserable, frightened eyes in such a peaked, white face—eyes that didn't believe in happiness or in home or in Christmas.

“Mother gave just one pitying little cry and flew for him.

“All the motherhood in the world was in her look when she gathered him into her arms; and he hid his face against her shoulder, as though he knew he needn't be afraid any longer.

“She carried him off to the summer kitchen without a word to any of the rest of us; and, when we started to follow, Father said: ‘Stay here, Chicks.’ So we stayed, but I nearly

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died of excitement and curiosity in the next half hour.

Finally Mother came back with the boy clinging to her hand. We hardly knew him. He had been fed and scoured and his hair had been cut and he was dressed in clothes Joe had worn at his age; but it was in his eyes that Mother had worked the biggest change. There was no fright or misery in them now—only a shy, shining faith that would grow to happiness—the look of a child that had been mothered.

“Mother sat down in her chair and took the boy on her lap. ‘That’s your Granny, over there in the corner, dear,’ she said. ‘And these are your little brothers and sisters, and this is your home.’

“He believed it. Since he had found her he was ready to believe in any wonderful, good thing. She held him in her arms, while Father read

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us the story about the shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night, and about the Babe of Bethlehem; and, every once in a while, the boy would look up into Mother's face to see if these wonderful things were true, too.

"‘A blessed Christmas Child like you, dearie,’ she said, when the reading ended.

"‘He hadn’t had a word to say, but he spoke up then. ‘Aw, shucks!’ he said; ‘He was only a baby. I’m a big boy. I’m most six.’

"‘Father was sort of shocked, but Mother understood. ‘So you are, Honey,’ she said, ‘and so you’re going to be the greatest possible help and comfort to me.’

"‘He was, too, a help and comfort to her as long as she lived, and the very best Christmas present any family ever had.’"

"‘But it was a big risk,’ commented

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the head of the family, who didn't believe in adopting children.

The Little Old Lady looked at him tolerantly. "It's plain to be seen, Robin," she said, "that you don't remember your grandmother. There wasn't any risk in a mothering job when she undertook it."

THE END



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